



ANTON  
CHEKHOV

Selected Works  
in Two Volumes

Volume Two

PLAYS



PROGRESS PUBLISHERS  
MOSCOW

Translated from the Russian by Kathleen Cook

А. П. Чехов  
ИЗБРАННЫЕ ПРОИЗВЕДЕНИЯ В ДВУХ ТОМАХ  
Том второй. Пьесы.  
*На английском языке*

First printing .  
Second printing .

© Издательство Прогресс,

English translation © Progress Publishers,

*Printed in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics*

ц 70301-846----- 127-79  
014 (01) -79

4702010100

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he found it easier to look through his pince-nez like that. Perhaps it was his habit of staring over the head of the person who was talking to him, or his fussy manner of constantly adjusting his pince-nez, that made him seem arrogant and insincere in my eyes, but in fact all this came from his engaging shyness, something I could not understand at the time.

Another meeting of little consequence which remains in my memory took place in Moscow in the Korsh Theatre at an evening of music and literature for the Writers' Fund.

It was the first time I had performed in a real theatre before a real audience and I was very full of myself.

Not unintentionally, I left my overcoat in the corridor of the stalls, instead of backstage as actors should. I planned to put it on amid the admiring glances of the public which I was preparing to take by storm.

As it was, things turned out quite differently. I was in a hurry to get away unnoticed.

It was at this critical moment that the meeting with Chekhov took place.

He walked straight up and addressed me in the following friendly fashion.

"They say you act my play *The Bear* splendidly. I say . . . do act it again. I'll come and watch, then write a review."

After a pause, he added:

"And get a fee."

After another pause, he concluded:

"One rouble, twenty-five copecks."

I must confess that I was offended because he had not praised me for the part I had just acted.

Now I remember these words with great affection.

Obviously Chekhov wanted to cheer me up with his joke after my lack of success.

The setting of the third and last meeting which I recall during the early period of my acquaintanceship with Chekhov was as follows.

The small, cramped office of the editor of a well-known journal.

Lots of people I did not know.

The room full of cigarette smoke.

An architect, who was well known at that time and was a friend of Chekhov's, was displaying his design for a building containing a public recreation hall, a tea-room and a theatre. I made some

diffident professional objections. Everyone listened gravely except Chekhov who wandered round the room making everyone laugh and, to be frank, getting in everyone's way. That evening he looked particularly pleased with life: large, flushed and smiling.

At the time I did not understand what had put him in such a good mood.

Now I know.

He was delighted with this fine, new venture in Moscow. He was happy that a small ray of light was to reach the uneducated. In later years, too, he was always delighted by anything that made life better for the ordinary people.

"I say, that's splendid!" he would exclaim on such occasions with a pure childlike smile that made him look years younger.

The second period of my acquaintanceship with Chekhov is rich in precious memories.

The spring of 189(7) saw the birth of the Moscow Art Theatre.

Shareholders were found with great difficulty, for the new enterprise was not expected to be a success.

Chekhov answered the first appeal and became a shareholder. He took a great interest in all the trivia of our preliminary work and asked us to write to him more often and more fully.

He was impatient to come to Moscow, but illness tied him to Yalta which he called Devil's Island, comparing himself with Dreyfus.

Most of all, of course, he was interested in the theatre's repertoire.

He was quite adamant about not allowing a production of his *Seagull*. After its lack of success in St. Petersburg\*, it had become his sick and consequently his favourite child.

Nevertheless in August 1898 *The Seagull* was included in the repertoire. I do not know how Nemirovich-Danchenko talked him round.

I went away to Kharkov Gubernia to write the *mise-en-scène*.

I found it a difficult task for, to my shame, I did not understand the play. Only while I was working on it, did I gradually get the feel of it and fall in love with it almost without noticing. Chekhov's plays have this quality. Once having surrendered to their charm, you want to drink in their fragrance.

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\* A reference to the failure of *The Seagull* at its first performance in the Alexandrinsky Theatre in 1896.

I soon learnt from letters that Chekhov had succumbed to temptation and gone to Moscow. He had gone, probably, to watch the rehearsals of *The Seagull*, which had already begun by that time. He was most concerned about it. By the time I returned to Moscow he had left. Bad weather had driven him back to Yalta. The rehearsals on *The Seagull* were temporarily discontinued.

Then came the anxious days of the opening of the Art Theatre and the first few months of its existence.

Things were going badly for the theatre. With the exception of *Fyodor Ioannovich*, which was playing to well-filled houses, nothing was bringing in the public. All our hopes were pinned on Hauptmann's *Hanneles*, but then Metropolitan Vladimir of Moscow found it obscene and banned it.

Our position had become critical, particularly as we did not place any financial hopes on *The Seagull*.

We had to put it on, however. Everyone realised that the fate of the theatre depended on its success.

And that was not all. Yet another heavy responsibility was added. On the eve of the first night, after a most unpromising dress rehearsal, Anton Pavlovich's sister, Maria Pavlovna Chekhova, appeared in the theatre.

She was most alarmed by the bad news from Yalta.

She was horrified at the thought of *The Seagull* failing a second time with the sick author in his present state, and she could not reconcile herself to the risk we were taking.

We too were frightened and even talked about cancelling the first night, which would have been equivalent to closing down the theatre.

It is not easy to sign the death warrant for one's own creation and doom a troupe to starvation.

And the shareholders? What would they say? Our duty towards them was only too clear.

At eight o'clock the following evening the curtain went up.\* It was a small audience. How the first act went I have no idea. I only remember that all the actors smelt of Valerian drops. I remember that sitting in the dark with my back to the audience during Zarechnaya's monologue made me terrified and I clasped my leg to stop it from shaking.

---

\* *The Seagull's* first performance in the Moscow Art Theatre took place on December 17, 1898.

It looked like a failure. There was a deathly silence as the curtain went down. The actors huddled together fearfully and waited for a sound from the audience.

Deathly silence.

The workmen peeped out from behind the sets and also listened. Silence.

Someone started crying. Knipper just managed to restrain her hysterical sobs. We filed silently backstage.

At this moment the audience burst into applause and cheering. We rushed to raise the curtain.

Apparently we stood on the stage only half facing the audience, with ghastly expressions on our faces. No one had the presence of mind to bow to the auditorium and one of us was even sitting down. Obviously we were too dazed to realise what was going on.

The play was a tremendous success with the audience, and it was just like Easter on the stage. Everybody was embracing one another, including total strangers who rushed up onto the stage. Someone had hysterics. Lots of people, including myself, danced a wild dance of joy and exultation.

At the end of the evening the audience demanded that a telegram be sent to the author.

From that evening onwards there was almost a family bond between us and Chekhov.

\* \* \*

The first season came to an end, spring arrived, and the trees began to bud.

Chekhov also came north, in the wake of the swallows.

He went to live in his sister's small apartment in the house belonging to a Mr Shishkov in Degtyarny Pereulok off Malaya Dmitrovka.

A plain table in the middle of the room, an inkstand, also quite plain, a pen, pencil, upholstered divan, a few chairs, a suitcase of books and notes, in a word, the bare necessities and nothing else. This was the usual state of his improvised study when he was travelling.

With time the room acquired several sketches by young artists, always talented, simple and novel. In most cases the theme of these pictures was also simple—the Russian countryside à la Levitan: birchtrees, a stream, a field, a country-house, and so on.

Chekhov did not like frames, so the sketches were usually fixed to the wall with drawing pins.

Slim writing pads soon began to appear on the desk—a lot of them. At that time Chekhov was busy proof-reading the forgotten, very short stories of his early period. He was preparing a new edition of short stories for his publisher Marx. Reading them over afresh he would laugh goodnaturedly, and his rich baritone filled the tiny apartment.

The samovar was often bubbling next to his room, and the visitors round the tea table came and went like an ever-changing kaleidoscope.

The painter Levitan, the poet Bunin, Nemirovich-Danchenko, the actor Vishnevsky from our theatre, Sulerzhitsky and many others frequently sat there for hours on end.

Seated amidst this company there was usually some silent male or female figure, whom hardly anyone knew. It was either an admirer, or a writer from Siberia, or someone from the neighbouring estate, an old schoolmate, or a childhood friend whom the host himself did not remember.

These persons embarrassed everybody, particularly Chekhov. But he made extensive use of the right he had won for himself: to run away from his guests. His coughing and pacing round the room would be heard behind the closed door. Everyone got used to this disappearing act and knew that if a company gathered more congenial to Chekhov's taste, he would appear more frequently and even sit down with them, throwing an occasional wary glance through his pince-nez at the silent figure of the unbidden guest.

He himself was incapable of refusing to receive a visitor or hinting that a guest had overstayed his welcome. What is more, Chekhov got angry when this was done for him, although he used to smile contentedly when someone managed to deal with this type of visitor. If the stranger stayed too long, Chekhov would sometimes open his study door slightly and call in one of his close friends.

"I say," he would whisper persuasively, making sure the door was properly closed, "do tell him that I don't know him and that I never went to grammar school. He's got a novel in his pocket, I know it. He'll stay to lunch, then he'll read it.... People really shouldn't be allowed to ... I say...."

When anybody rang at the door, he sat down quickly on the divan and stayed there quietly, trying not to cough. There was a sudden hush in the apartment, and the guests stopped talking or hid

away, so that when the door was opened the new arrival would not suspect that there was a living soul in the flat.

You heard the rustling of Maria Pavlovna's skirt, then the sound of the door chain and two people in conversation.

"Oh, he's busy?" exclaimed an unknown voice.

Long pause.

"A-ah!" thoughtfully.

Another pause. Then only the odd word was audible.

"Visitor to Moscow—see him just for a minute."

"I'll pass them on to him," answered Maria Pavlovna.

"A very short story ... a play..." the stranger pleaded with her.

"Good-bye," Maria Pavlovna bade him.

"Humblest respects ... competent opinion of a person like him..."

"I'll pass them on to him," Maria Pavlovna repeated.

"Helping young writer ... enlightened patronage..."

"Without fail. Good-bye," Maria Pavlovna replied even more sweetly.

"Beg pardon!" Then came the sounds of a package being dropped, the rustle of papers, the galoshes being put on, and again: "Good-bye! Humblest, profound, sentiments ... moments of aesthetic delight ... profound ... sincerest..."

Finally the door slammed and Maria Pavlovna placed some tattered manuscripts and a broken piece of string on the desk.

"Tell them I don't write any more... There's no sense in writing..." Chekhov would say, looking at the manuscript.

Yet he not only read all these manuscripts, but actually replied to the senders.

\* \* \*

Do not imagine that after the success of *The Seagull* and several years of his absence our meeting was an emotional one. Chekhov shook my hand somewhat more firmly than usual, smiled sweetly—and that was all. He did not like effusiveness. Yet I felt the urge to be effusive towards him, because I had become a great admirer of his talent. It was difficult for me to behave simply towards him as I had before. I felt small in his presence. I wanted to be bigger and cleverer than God had made me, so I chose my words carefully, trying to talk about elevated things, like an adoring female in the presence of her

idol. Chekhov was aware of this and it made him embarrassed. It was a long time before I learned to behave simply towards him, although that was the only relationship that he sought with people.

At this meeting, moreover, I could not conceal my shock at the fatal change in him. The illness had taken its savage toll. Perhaps my expression frightened him, but it was difficult for the two of us to be alone together.

Fortunately, Nemirovich-Danchenko soon arrived and we began to discuss the matter in hand, namely, that we wanted sole rights to produce his play *Uncle Vanya*.

"I say, but why do you want it? I'm not a playwright after all," Chekhov hedged.

The trouble was that the Imperial Maly Theatre was also after the same thing. Yuzhin, so energetic in championing the interests of his theatre, was not losing any time.

In order to avoid the painful necessity of offending one of us by a refusal, Chekhov invented all sorts of reasons for not giving the play to either theatre.

"I really must rewrite it," he said to Yuzhin, while assuring us: "But I don't know your theatre. I shall have to see you act."

Luck was on our side. One of the officials at the Imperial Theatre invited Chekhov to visit him and discuss the matter. It would have been more correct, of course, if he had taken the trouble to go and see Chekhov himself.

The conversation began most strangely. First of all, the official asked the famous writer:

"What do you do for a living?"

"I write," replied Chekhov in amazement.

"Er, well, I know, of course ... but ... what do you write?" said the official, getting confused.

Chekhov reached for his hat.

Then the good man made haste, with even more disastrous consequences, to get straight down to business. This was that the repertoire committee which was considering *Uncle Vanya* objected to the pistol shot at the end. They wanted the end to be rewritten. The minute contained more or less the following argument: that it was highly undesirable for a university professor, a high-ranking public official with a diploma, to be shot at with a pistol.

At this point Chekhov bowed and took his leave, after requesting that a copy of this delightful minute be sent to him. He showed it to us with unconcealed indignation.

After this comic episode, the question decided itself. Nevertheless Chekhov went on repeating persistently:

"I don't know your theatre."

This was a ruse. He simply wanted to see us perform *The Seagull*. So we gave him the opportunity.

For want of permanent premises our theatre was temporarily based in the Nikitsky Theatre. A private performance was announced and all the sets were brought to there.

One would hardly have expected the atmosphere of a dirty, empty, unlit, damp theatre without its own furniture, to put the actors and their sole spectator into the right frame of mind. Nevertheless Chekhov enjoyed the performance. He had probably missed the theatre a lot during his "exile" in Yalta.

With almost childlike pleasure he wandered round the stage and the actors' grimy dressing-rooms. He loved the theatre's seamy side as well as its gloss.

He enjoyed the performance, but criticised some of the performers. Including me as Trigorin.

"You act splendidly," he said, "only it's not my character. I didn't mean him to be like that."

"What was wrong?" I asked.

"He wears check trousers and down-at-the-heel shoes" was all that Chekhov would say in answer to my insistent questioning.

"Check trousers . . . and smokes a cigar like this. . . ." He illustrated this by a clumsy imitation.

I could not get any more out of him.

He always delivered his criticism in this way: graphically and concisely.

It surprised you and imprinted itself on your memory. It was as if Chekhov were acting a charade that you had to puzzle over until you guessed the meaning.

Not until six years later did I guess this charade, in another revival of *The Seagull*.

Indeed, why had I acted Trigorin as a handsome dandy in white trousers and white *bain de mer* shoes? Surely not because women fall in love with him? That get-up was certainly not typical of a Russian writer, was it? The point is not the check trousers, down-at-the-heel shoes and cigar, of course. Nina Zarechnaya, who has devoured Trigorin's nice but shallow short stories, falls in love with her youthful dream, not with him. This is the tragedy of the slayed seagull. This is the mockery and crudity of life. A provincial girl in love



for the first time does not notice either the check trousers, or the worn shoes, or the stinking cigar. Life's ugliness is realised too late, when life is broken, all sacrifices made and love turned into habit. New illusions are needed, for one must go on living—and Nina looks for them in zealotry.

I have digressed, though.

He criticised the acting of one part most severely, to the point of harshness. It was hard to imagine harshness in a person so exceptionally mild. Chekhov demanded that the role be taken away at once. He would not accept any apologies and threatened to forbid further production of the play.

As long as other parts were being discussed he would allow a kindly joke about the shortcomings in the acting, but as soon as the conversation turned to this particular role his tone changed immediately and he attacked mercilessly with heavy blows:

"It can't be allowed really. You're doing a serious job of work, after all," he said.

This was the gist of his ruthless argument.

His attitude to our theatre was also to be discerned in the same words. He never gave any compliments, any detailed criticism or any encouragement.

Thanks to the warm weather Chekhov spent the whole of the spring in Moscow and came to our rehearsals each day.

He did not go very deeply into our work. He simply liked being in the atmosphere of the theatre and chat to high-spirited actors. He loved the theatre, but could not stand vulgarity in it. Vulgarity made him either squirm painfully or take to his heels.

"I really must go, do excuse me, they're waiting for me." And he would go home, settle down on the divan and think.

A few days later, like a reflex, Chekhov would come out with a phrase which took everyone by surprise and described perfectly the piece of vulgarity that had upset him.

"I objectively object," he said unexpectedly one day and burst into peals of laughter. He had remembered an excruciatingly long speech by a person who was not entirely Russian and had used these words in talking about the poetry of the Russian countryside.

\* \* \*

Judging from his letters, Chekhov spent the whole winter dreaming about going to Moscow. He was now very attached to our the-







Chekhov with members of the cast of *The Seagull* (1899)



atre, which he had actually never seen, not counting the one improvised performance of *The Seagull*.

He conceived the idea of writing a play for us.

"But it is essential that I should see you acting for this," he kept repeating in his letters.

When it became known that his doctors had forbidden his spring visit to Moscow, we took the hint and decided to go to Yalta with the whole troupe, sets, props and all.

It was the spring of our theatre, the most sweet-scented and joyful period of its young life. We were going to see Anton Pavlovich in the Crimea, we were setting off on tour, people were waiting for us, writing about us. We were the heroes of the day not only in Moscow, but also in the Crimea, i.e., in Sevastopol and Yalta.

"Anton Pavlovich cannot come to us because he is ill, so we are going to him because we are healthy. If Mahomet won't come to the mountain, the mountain must go to Mahomet," we told ourselves.

The actors, their wives, children and nannies, the stagehands, dressmakers, hairdressers and several carriages of scenery and props all left cold Moscow at the height of the slushy season for the southern sun. Off with the fur coats! On with the light dresses and straw hats! Never mind that we'll freeze for a day or two on the way! We'll warm up when we get there! A whole carriage was put at our disposal and the journey would take two days. When people are young and spring is in the air, everything seems bright and gay. It would be impossible to describe all the jokes, amusing scenes and comic incidents during our journey. We sang, romped about, and made new friends.

Finally, here was Bakhchisarai—a warm spring morning, flowers, gay Tatar costumes with pretty patterns, and the sun. And here was white Sevastopol! There are few towns in the world more fair! White sand, white houses, chalky hills, pale blue sky, deep blue sea with white-flecked waves, white clouds with a blinding sun, and white seagulls! A few hours later, however, the sky clouded over, the sea turned black, the wind rose, and it began to sleet, with an ominous siren wailing endlessly. Winter again! Poor Anton Pavlovich who had to sail over to us from Yalta in such a storm! But we waited for him, and searched the Yalta boat for him in vain. All that arrived was a telegram to say he had fallen ill again. It was most unlikely that he would come to Sevastopol.

The summer theatre where we were to act stood gloomily by the shore, with boarded-up doors. They had not been unlocked all

winter, and when they swung open before our eyes and we went inside, the theatre was so cold and damp that we felt as if we were at the North Pole!

Each day before rehearsals our young troupe of actors met on the square by the theatre. The well-known theatre critic Vasiliev, who had come down from Moscow to report on the tour, was also there.

"This is how Goldoni used to travel, with his own critics," was how he explained his role in our troupe.

Easter came and the warmth returned. Chekhov arrived unexpectedly. He too began to come to the morning gatherings in the town park. One day he heard they were looking for a doctor for a sick actor, Artem, of whom he was very fond and for whom he subsequently wrote special parts in *The Three Sisters* (Chebutykin) and *The Cherry Orchard*.

"Listen, I'm the theatre's doctor!" exclaimed Chekhov. He was far prouder of his medical knowledge than his literary talent.

"I'm a doctor by profession, but I sometimes write in my spare time," he would say very seriously. Chekhov went off to treat his beloved Artem and prescribed him Valerian drops, i.e., the same medicine as his Dr Dorn—one of the characters in *The Seagull*—gives everyone as a joke.

The first night arrived. We showed *Uncle Vanya* to Chekhov and, incidentally, Sevastopol as well. It was a stupendous success. The author took no end of curtain calls. This time Chekhov was fully satisfied with the performance. It was the first time he had seen our theatre putting on a proper show for the public. During the intervals Anton Pavlovich dropped in to see me, and praised me, but at the end he made one criticism concerning Astrov's departure.

"Listen, he whistles. . . . Whistles! Uncle Vanya cries, but Astrov whistles!" On this occasion, too, I could not get any more out of him.

"How can it be," I asked myself. "Sadness, hopelessness, and—a merry whistle?"

But this remark of Chekhov's also came to life at a later performance. I decided to whistle; just like that, as an act of faith. And immediately realised how right it was! Yes. Uncle Vanya loses heart and gives way to dejection; but Astrov whistles. Why? Because he has so lost faith in people and life that his distrust of them has become cynicism. People can no longer upset him. But fortunately for Astrov, he loves nature and serves it disinterestedly, selflessly; he plants forests and the forests retain the moisture needed for rivers.

The plays which we brought to the Crimea included Hauptmann's *Die Einsamen*. This was the first time Chekhov had seen it, and he liked it more than his own plays.

"He's a real playwright! I'm not a playwright, you know, I'm a doctor."

From Sevastopol we moved to Yalta where we were awaited by practically the whole Russian literary world which seemed to have conspired to gather in the Crimea for our guest tour. There were Bunin, Kuprin, Mamin-Sibiryak, Chirikov, Stanyukovich, Elpatievsky and, finally, Maxim Gorky, who had just become famous and was living in the Crimea because of a lung disease. It was here that we got to know Gorky, whom we tried to persuade to write a play for us. One of his future plays, *The Lower Depths*, was already conceived at that time, perhaps even sketched in broad outline, and he talked to me about it.

Apart from writers, there were many actors and musicians in the Crimea, the young Rakhmaninov prominent among them.

Every day at a certain time all the actors and writers converged on Chekhov who gave his guests breakfast. Anton Pavlovich's sister, Maria Pavlovna, our common friend, managed the household. His mother, a charming old lady, beloved by all of us presided at the table. Listening to accounts of the success of Chekhov's plays, she decided she must go to the theatre, in spite of her advanced years, and see, not us of course, but her Anton's play. On the day she was to go I came for breakfast and found Chekhov extremely perturbed. It turned out that Mama had dug up an ancient silk dress to wear that evening at the theatre. Chekhov was horrified.

"Mama in that silk dress watching Anton's play! I say, that's really too much!"

Immediately after this heated exclamation, he burst into gay, infectious laughter, for the picture of Mama in her silk dress applauding her son who had written the play and went to the theatre every night to take a curtain call, seemed to him very amusing and sentimental.

Literature was often discussed at Chekhov's daily luncheons. These discussions between specialists taught me many secrets which I found very important and useful in my work as a director and actor, of which our dry-as-dust pedagogues who teach the history of literature have not the slightest inkling. Chekhov tried to persuade everyone to write plays for the Art Theatre. One day somebody said it would be easy to dramatise one of Chekhov's stories. The



book was fetched and Moskvín was made to read a few stories. His reading pleased Anton Pavlovich so much that from then onwards he made the gifted actor read something each day after lunch. This is how Moskvín became the classic reader of Chekhov's stories at charity concerts.

Our guest tour in the Crimea came to an end. To reward us for coming, Chekhov and Gorky both promised to write us a play. Between ourselves, this was actually one of the main reasons why the mountain had gone to Mahomet.



After the success of *The Seagull* and *Uncle Vanya* the theatre could not get along without a new play by Chekhov. From then onwards our fate lay in the hands of Anton Pavlovich: if there were a play, there would also be a season, if there were no play, the theatre would lose its special flavour. So naturally we were interested in how the writer's work was progressing. The most up-to-date information about him always came from Olga Knipper. Why was she so well informed about everything? Why was she forever letting slip about Anton Pavlovich's health, or the weather in the Crimea, or the play, or his arrival or non-arrival in Moscow?

"A-ha!" we said.

Finally, to everyone's delight, Chekhov sent us the first act of the new play—without a title. Then came the second act, the third—and only the last one was missing. Eventually Anton Pavlovich himself arrived with the last act, and a reading was arranged with the author himself present. A large baize-covered table was put in the foyer and everyone took a seat round it with Chekhov and the stage directors in the middle. The whole company was present, as well as the ushers, some of the stagehands and the dressmakers. The atmosphere was one of ebullient expectation. The author was nervous and felt uncomfortable as chairman. He kept jumping up and walking about, especially at moments when he felt that the conversation was taking a wrong turn, or simply becoming distasteful to him. In discussing their impressions of the play that had just been read, some people called it a drama and others a tragedy, without noticing that these names puzzled Chekhov. He was certain that he had written an hilarious comedy, but at the reading everyone reacted to the play as a drama and wept as they listened to it. This made Chekhov think that his play was a flop.

After the first reading of the play the work of stage direction began. As always Nemirovich-Danchenko was primarily in charge of the literary section and I, of course, wrote a detailed *mise-en-scène*: who should go where for what, what they should feel, what they should do, how they should look and so on.

The actors worked with a will and before long the play had been rehearsed to the point where everything was clear, plain and correct. Nevertheless it did not sound right, it was not alive, and it seemed long and boring. A certain *something* was missing. How painful it was, searching for that *something* without knowing what it was! Everything was ready and we should have announced the opening night, but if we put on the play as it was, limp and lifeless, it was bound to be a failure. At the same time we felt that the right ingredients for its success were there, that we had everything necessary to put the play across except for that magic *something*. We met, rehearsed hard, gave up in despair, went home and the next day the same thing was repeated with the same lack of results.

"Listen, everyone, all this is because we're trying to be too clever," somebody suddenly decided. "We're actually acting Chekhovian boredom, the Chekhovian mood, we're making it drag. We must lift the tone, quicken the pace, like vaudeville."

So we began to act quickly, i.e., we tried to speak and move faster, which caused the action to become confused and words and whole phrases to be lost. The result was a general commotion that made everything even more boring. It was even difficult to understand what the characters were saying and what was actually happening on the stage.

I should like to describe an interesting event that took place at one of those awful rehearsals. It happened in the evening. The work was going badly. The cast stopped in the middle of the play and simply gave up acting, not seeing any point in rehearsing further. They had lost faith in the producer and in one another. This sudden collapse of energy is usually the beginning of a general loss of morale. Everyone drifted off into corners in silent despair. The two or three electric lights were burning dimly and we sat in the semi-darkness, utterly disheartened. Someone began nervously scratching the bench, making a sound like scrabbling mice. For some reason this sound reminded me of home; I felt a rush of warmth, a sudden perception of truth and life, and my intuition began to work. Or perhaps the sound of scrabbling mice combined with darkness and a state of helplessness had at some time possessed a significance in

my life of which I myself am not aware. Who can divine the paths of the artist's supra-consciousness!

Whatever the reason I suddenly got the feel of the scene we were rehearsing. We became relaxed on the stage. Chekhov's people had settled down. And it turned out that they didn't want to wallow in their sadness at all. They were seeking for gaiety, laughter and cheerfulness. They wanted to live, not vegetate. I sensed that this was the right attitude towards Chekhov's characters. It gave me heart, and I intuitively knew what had to be done.

After this the work got well under way again. The only part that was still not right was Knipper's Masha, but Nemirovich-Danchenko helped her work on it, and at later rehearsals something seemed to open up inside her as well and the part began to go beautifully.

Poor Anton Pavlovich did not wait for the first night. He went abroad using the deterioration in his health as an excuse. I think there was a different reason, namely, his anxiety about the play. My suspicion was also confirmed by the fact that he did not leave an address for us to let him know about the result of the first night. Even Olga Knipper did not know it, and you would have thought that she. . . .

In his place Chekhov left his trusted adviser on military questions, a pleasant colonel who was to make sure that there were no errors in the officers' uniform, bearing, customs, and way of life, etc. Chekhov was particularly concerned about this, because there were rumours in the town that he had written a play attacking the army and these had given rise to embarrassment, bad feeling and apprehension among military men. In fact the last thing Chekhov wanted was to offend the military. He thought very highly of them, particularly those who were posted to the provinces, who, he used to say, fulfilled a cultural mission in remote parts of the country by bringing with them new demands on life, knowledge, art, fun and enjoyment.

In connection with the production of *The Three Sisters* I remember another incident typical of Chekhov. During the dress rehearsals we received a letter from him from abroad, again without his exact address. It read simply: "Cut out the whole of Andrei's monologue in the last act and replace it with the words: 'A wife is a wife'." In the original manuscript Andrei had a brilliant monologue giving a splendid description of the small-mindedness of many Russian women: before marriage they show a touch of poetry and femininity. But once married they cannot wait to put on dressing gowns

and slippers, or deck themselves out in all sorts of rich and tasteless attire; and their souls too get stifled by these dressing gowns and slippers. What can one say about such women and is there any point in dwelling on them at length? "A wife is a wife!" By his intonation the actor can express everything in these words. Here too Chekhov's profound and penetrating laconism made itself felt.

At the opening performance\* the first act showing Irina's birthday party was a great success; the actors had to come back on the stage for long ovations (which had not yet been prohibited at that time). But after the other acts and at the end of the play the applause was so thin that we only just managed one curtain call each time. We thought the production was a failure and the play and acting had been rejected. It took a lot of time for this work of Chekhov's to be appreciated by the public.

In terms of acting and stage direction this production is considered to be one of our theatre's best. And indeed Knipper, Lilina, Savitskaya, Moskvina, Kachalov, Gribunin, Vishnevsky, Gromov (and later Leonidov), Artem, Luzhsky and Samarova can be regarded as model performers and creators of classic Chekhov characters. I was also a success in the part of Vershinin, but not from my own point of view, since I did not find in this role that special feeling and state which are produced when there is a perfect fusion between the actor, the part and the writer.

When he returned from abroad Chekhov was pleased with us, but regretted one thing only, that the bell and the military signals during the fire were not done properly. He kept on complaining sadly to us about this. We suggested that he himself should re-rehearse the off-stage fire noises and provided him with all the necessary scenic apparatus. Anton Pavlovich, who was delighted to take on the role of stage director, threw himself into the task heart and soul and produced a list of things that had to be got ready for the sound test. I did not attend the rehearsal for fear of getting in his way and therefore did not know what had happened there.

During the actual performance, after the fire scene, Anton Pavlovich came into my dressing room, sat down unobtrusively on the corner of the divan and stayed there saying nothing. I was surprised and asked him what was the matter.

"Listen, that's really too much! They're laughing," he said with his usual conciseness.

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\* 31 January, 1901.

It turned out that next to the director's box was a group of spectators who had been finding fault with the play, the actors and the theatre in no uncertain terms. When the cacophony of fire sounds began they could not understand what it was intended to represent and had started cat-calling, joking and jeering, little knowing that next to them was the author of the play and director of the fire noises.

At the end of this account, Anton Pavlovich burst into good-natured laughter and was overcome with a fit of coughing that made your heart bleed for him and his illness.

\* \* \*

I was fortunate enough to be able to observe the conception of *The Cherry Orchard*. One day in a conversation with Anton Pavlovich about fishing our actor Artem mimed someone fixing a worm on a hook and then casting a line. These and similar scenes were portrayed by this inimitable artist with great skill, and Chekhov was genuinely sorry they could not be seen by a large audience in the theatre. Shortly afterwards Chekhov was present when another of our actors was bathing in the river and decided there and then:

"Listen, we must have Artem fishing in my play and N. taking a dip nearby, floundering about and shouting, and Artem getting angry with him for frightening away the fish."

Anton Pavlovich saw them in his mind's eye on the stage—one fishing and the other bathing. A few days later Anton Pavlovich announced solemnly to us that the bather's arm had been amputated; but in spite of this he adored playing billiards with his one remaining arm. The fisherman had turned out to be an old servant who had scraped together a little money.

A little later Chekhov's imagination began to picture a window in an old manor house with branches trailing through it from the trees outside. Then they burst into snowy white blossom. And then a lady came to live in Chekhov's imaginary house.

"But you haven't got the right actress for her. Listen! We need a special sort of old lady," reflected Chekhov. "She keeps going to the old servant and borrowing money from him...."

The old lady had either a brother or an uncle—the one-armed gentleman who was passionately fond of playing billiards. He was a big baby who could not live without his valet. One day the latter

went off without laying out his master's trousers and his master spent the whole day in bed. . . .

We now know what remained in the play and what disappeared completely or left a faint mark.

In the summer of 1902, when Anton Pavlovich was preparing to write *The Cherry Orchard*, he was staying with his wife, Olga Knipper-Chekhova, in our house on my mother's estate at Lyubimovka. Next door, living in our neighbours' family, was an English governess, a small, thin little creature with two long girlish plaits and a mannish suit. Thanks to this combination it was difficult to guess her sex, nationality or age. She was on very relaxed terms with Anton Pavlovich which pleased the writer enormously. They used to meet every day and talk the most awful nonsense to each other. Chekhov used to assure her, for example, that in his youth he had been a Turk with a harem, that he was going to return to his native land soon and become a pasha and then he would write and send for her. As if overcome with gratitude, the agile English girl would jump onto his shoulders, settle down there and salute all passers-by on his behalf, by taking his hat off his head and waving it, saying in a deliberately broken, clownish Russian:

"Gleetings! Gleetings!"

And inclining Chekhov's head in salutation.

Anyone who has seen *The Cherry Orchard* will recognise in this original creature the prototype of Charlotta.

After reading the play I immediately saw the likeness and wrote to Chekhov congratulating him warmly. How it upset him! How persistently he assured me that Charlotta had to be German and had to be big and bony—like the actress Muratova who bore no resemblance whatsoever to the English girl Charlotta was modelled on.

The part of Yepikhodov was created from many images. The main features were borrowed from a servant who looked after Anton Pavlovich. Chekhov often chatted to him, trying to persuade him that he ought to study, so as to be a literate, educated person. In order to achieve this end, Yepikhodov's prototype proceeded to buy himself a red tie and then conceived the desire to learn French. I do not know by what route Anton Pavlovich progressed from this servant to the character of the fairly corpulent, no longer young Yepikhodov, which appeared in the first version of the play.

But we did not have an actor with the right shape, and in any case we simply had to give a part in the play to Moskvín, that

talented actor of whom Anton Pavlovich was very fond, and who was young and slim at the time. The role was given to him and the young actor adapted it to suit his dimensions, demonstrating this improvisation at our first closed entertainment, about which more later. We thought Anton Pavlovich would be angry at such liberties, but he roared with laughter and told Moskvín at the end of the rehearsal:

"That's exactly the character I meant to create. Listen, it's marvellous!"

I remember that Chekhov revised the role in accordance with the changes made by Moskvín.

The part of the student Trofimov was also copied from one of the inhabitants of Lyubimovka.

In the autumn of 1903 Anton Pavlovich arrived in Moscow a very sick man. This did not prevent him from attending nearly all the rehearsals of his new play, however, for which he just could not finally decide on a title.

One evening I got a phone call requesting me to drop in and see Chekhov on business. I dropped my work, rushed off and found him in very high spirits, in spite of his illness. He was obviously saving up the conversation about business to the end, like children save a tasty morsel. For the time being, however, we all sat round the tea table laughing, because no one could stay gloomy in Chekhov's company. When we finished tea Anton Pavlovich took me into his study, shut the door, sat down in his usual corner of the divan, bade me sit opposite him and began trying to persuade me for the umpteenth time that some of the actors in his new play were not suitable and should be changed.

"They're wonderful actors, of course." He hastened to mitigate his sentence.

I knew this talk was simply a prelude to the main business, and therefore did not argue. Finally we got down to it. Chekhov paused and tried to assume a serious air. But he did not succeed, and a triumphant smile found its way to the surface.

"Listen, I've thought of a marvellous title for the play. Simply marvellous!" he announced, gazing at me intently.

"What?" I said excitedly.

"Vishnevi sad",\* and he burst out laughing merrily.

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\* *The Cherry Orchard*. It is pronounced here with the accent on the first syllable which means an orchard where cherries are grown for commercial purposes. The poetic form has the stress on the second syllable.

I could not understand why he was so pleased, for I did not find anything special about the name. In order not to upset Anton Pavlovich, however, I had to pretend that his discovery had impressed me. What was it about the play's new name that so excited him? I began to question him cautiously, but again came up against one of Chekhov's strange traits: he could not talk about his own writing. Instead of explaining, Anton Pavlovich began to repeat in various ways, with various intonations and sound shades:

"Vishnevi sad. Listen, it's a marvellous name! Vishnevi sad. Vishnevi!"

All I understood from this was that we were talking about something lovely and deeply cherished: the name's charm was conveyed not by the words but by the intonation of Anton Pavlovich's voice. I hinted at this warily; my comment upset him, the triumphant smile disappeared from his face, our conversation faltered and there was an awkward silence.

A few days, perhaps a week, passed after this conversation... Then one day during a performance he came to my dressing room and sat down by my table with a triumphant smile. Chekhov liked watching us get ready for a performance. He watched us making up so carefully that we could tell from his expression whether we were putting the paint on properly or not.

"Listen, it's Vishnyóvi sad, not Vishnevi," he announced and burst out laughing.

At first I did not realise what he was talking about, but Anton Pavlovich continued to savour the title, stressing the gentle "yo" sound in the word "Vishnyovi", as if he were trying with its help to caress that life, once beautiful but now useless, which he himself had weepingly destroyed in his play. This time I understood the subtle difference: "Vishnevi sad" is a business, a commercial orchard bringing in a profit. The sort of orchard that is still necessary today. But "Vishnyóvi sad" does not make a profit. It retains in itself and its blossoming whiteness the poetry of the country gentleman's life of yester-year. This orchard grows and blossoms to satisfy a mere whim, to gladden the eye of the spoiled aesthete. It is a pity to destroy it, but a necessity, for the country's economic development demands it.

This time, as before, we practically had to drag comments and advice on the play out of Anton Pavlovich. His answers were like riddles, and they had to be guessed because Chekhov would run



away to avoid the stage director's questions. If anyone had seen Anton Pavlovich at rehearsals, sitting unobtrusively at the back, they would never have believed he was the author. No matter how hard we tried to make him sit at the stage director's table, we were unsuccessful. And even if we got him to sit there, he would start laughing. You could never understand what amused him: that he had become a stage director and was sitting at this important desk, or that he thought the stage director's desk quite superfluous, or that he was wondering how to give us the slip and escape to his back seat.

"It's all there in the text," he would say then. "I'm not a stage director—I'm a doctor."

Comparing the way Chekhov behaved at rehearsals with the behaviour of other writers, one is amazed at the remarkable modesty of this great man and the infinite conceit of other, far less talented writers. One of them, for example, in reply to my suggestion that a long-winded, artificial and flowery monologue in his play should be shortened, told me in a mortally offended voice:

"Shorten it then, but do not forget that you will answer to history."

Yet when we dared to suggest to Anton Pavlovich that he cut out a whole scene—at the end of the second act of *The Cherry Orchard*—he looked very sad and blanched with the pain this caused him, but, after thinking it over and recovering from the shock, he replied:

"Go ahead!"

He never once reproached us with this later.

I shall not describe the production of *The Cherry Orchard* which we have acted so many times in Moscow, Europe and America. I shall simply recall some facts and circumstances relating to it.

It was difficult getting everything right, and no wonder, for the play itself is a very difficult one. Its attraction lies in its elusive deeply buried fragrance. To smell it you have to open the bud, as it were, and make it flower. But this must happen of its own accord, without force, otherwise you will crush the fragile bloom and it will die.

At the time I am describing our inner technique and ability to stimulate the creative soul of the actors were still fairly primitive. We had not yet fully discovered those secret passages to the very depths of a work. To help the actors, to rouse their affective memory and creative foresight, we tried to create an illusion for them by the

use of sets, light and sound effects. Sometimes this helped, and I got used to making excessive use of light and sound scenic devices.

"Listen!" Chekhov told someone, making sure that I could hear him. "I'm going to write a new play and it will begin like this: 'How splendidly quiet it is! No birds, no dogs, no cuckoos, no owls, no nightingales, no clocks, no sleigh bells and not a single cricket to be heard!'"

This was a dig at me, of course.

\* \* \*

For the first time since we started producing Chekhov, the première\* coincided with his visit to Moscow. This gave us the idea of arranging a celebration in honour of our dearly beloved writer. Chekhov objected strongly and threatened to stay at home and not come to the theatre. But the temptation was too great for us, and we insisted. What was more, the first night coincided with Anton Pavlovich's birthday (17/30 January).

The day was close at hand, and we had to think about the celebration itself and what to present to Anton Pavlovich. A difficult question! I went round all the antique shops, hoping to find something, but apart from a splendid piece of embroidery fine enough for a museum, there was nothing. In the absence of anything more suitable the wreath was decorated with it and presented like that.

"At least we shall be giving him something artistic," I thought.

But Anton Pavlovich ticked me off for giving him such a valuable present.

"Listen, it's an absolutely marvellous thing, it ought to be kept in a museum," he said to me reproachfully after the jubilee.

"But what should I have given you, Anton Pavlovich?" I said in self-defence.

"A mouse trap," he replied seriously, after a moment's thought. "Mice have to be destroyed, don't they?" Then he began to chuckle himself. "Korovin the artist sent me a marvellous present! Marvellous!"

"What was it?" I asked interestedly.

"Fishing rods."

None of the other presents he received pleased Chekhov either, and some of them even irritated him by their banality.

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\* 17 January, 1904.

"Listen, you can't give a writer a silver pen and an antique inkstand."

"Well, what should you give then?"

"A stomach pump. I'm a doctor, after all. Or socks. My wife doesn't look after me properly. She's an actress. I go around with holes in my socks. 'Listen, my sweet,' I say to her, 'my big toe's sticking out on my right foot.' 'Well, put the sock on the left foot, then,' she says. What a life!" Anton Pavlovich joked and burst out laughing.

But he was not very gay at the jubilee itself, as if he sensed that his end was nigh. When he stood on the stage at the end of the third act, thin and pale as death, and could not restrain his cough while he was being welcomed with speeches and presents, our hearts ached for him. Somebody from the audience shouted to him to sit down. But Chekhov frowned and stood throughout the whole long, drawn-out ceremony of the jubilee, which he had poked gentle fun at in his works. Here, too, he could not resist a smile. One of the literary men began his speech with almost the same words that Gayev uses to address the old cupboard in the first act:

"Dear and much respected ... (instead of saying cupboard the speaker said Chekhov's name)... I greet you" and so on.

Anton Pavlovich caught my eye—I had acted Gayev—and an amused smile twitched his lips.

The jubilee was very impressive, but it left a sad impression behind it, a kind of funeral aura, and we all went home with heavy hearts.

The first night itself was not much of a success, and we blamed ourselves for having failed to convey the most important, finest and most valuable things in the play right from the start.

Anton Pavlovich died without seeing his last, sweet-smelling work become a real success.

With time, when the production had matured, many of the members of our troupe displayed their great talents in it yet again, particularly Olga Knipper in the main role as Ranevskaya, Moskvina as Yepikhodov, Kachalov as Trofimov, Leonidov as Lopakhin, Gribunin as Pishchik, Artem as Feers and Muratova as Charlotta. I was also a success in the part of Gayev and was actually praised at a rehearsal by Anton Pavlovich Chekhov himself—for my final exit in the fourth act.

The spring of 1904 was approaching. Anton Pavlovich's health became worse and worse. Alarming symptoms appeared in the region

of the stomach, which suggested intestinal tuberculosis. Chekhov's doctors said he must be sent to Badenweiler. Preparations began for his departure. All of us, myself included, tried to spend more time with Anton Pavlovich before his departure. Bad health frequently prevented him from receiving us. In spite of his sickness, however, his *joie de vivre* never deserted him. He was very interested in a production of Maeterlinck which was being rehearsed at the time.\* We had to keep him up-to-date with the work, show him models of the scenery and explain the *mise-en-scènes*.

He himself was dreaming about writing a new play of a totally new type for him. The subject he had in mind for this new play really did not seem at all Chekhovian. Judge for yourselves. Two friends, both young men, love the same woman. Their relationship with each other is complicated by this shared love and jealousy. Finally they both go away on an expedition to the North Pole. The set for the last act shows a huge ship caught in the ice. The play ends with the friends seeing a white vision floating over the snow. Apparently this is the ghost or soul of the woman they love, who has died far away in their native land.

This was all we could find out from Anton Pavlovich about the new play he had in mind.

During his journey abroad, according to the accounts of Olga Knipper-Chekhova, Anton Pavlovich enjoyed the cultural life of Europe. Sitting on his small balcony in Badenweiler, he would watch people working in the post office opposite. People came there from far and wide, bringing their thoughts expressed in letters, and these thoughts were carried from there all over the world.

"It's marvellous!" he would exclaim. . . .

The sad news of Anton Pavlovich's death in Badenweiler arrived in the summer of 1904.

The dying man's last words were "Ich sterbe"\*\*. His death was beautiful, calm and dignified.

Chekhov died and after his death he became even more beloved in his native land, Europe and America. In spite of his success and popularity, however, he has remained misunderstood and unappreciated by many. Instead of an obituary, I should like to voice a few thoughts about him.

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\* The theatre was working on three one-act plays by Maeterlinck.

\*\* I am dying (German).

People still see Chekhov as a person who wrote about the everyday life of dreary, ordinary people, and his plays as an unfortunate page in Russian life, illustrating the country's spiritual vegetation. The discontent which paralysed all initiatives, the despair, the wasted energy, the full range for the development of generic Slav melancholy. These are thought to be the motifs of his dramatic works.

But why does this pictures so strongly contradict my ideas and memories of the late writer? I see him cheerful and smiling far more often than gloomy, although I knew him in the bad periods of his illness. The atmosphere around the sick Chekhov was more often than not one of joking, witticisms, laughter and even pranks. Who could amuse people or say funny things with a straight face better than he? Who detested ignorance, rudeness, whining, gossip, vulgarity and interminable tea-drinking more than he? Who longed for life and culture, no matter what form they took, more than he? Any useful new venture—like founding a scientific society or designing a new theatre, library or museum—was a real event for him. Even the ordinary, everyday provision of amenities made him unusually high-spirited and excited. I remember his childlike delight, for example, when I told him about a large block of flats being built by the Krasniye Vorota in Moscow in place of a decrepit single-story house that had been demolished. For a long time afterwards Anton Pavlovich used to recount this enthusiastically to everyone who came to see him: so hard did he seek in everything the harbinger of the future culture of Russia and the whole of mankind. not only spiritual culture but even external as well.

The same is true of his plays: amidst the total hopelessness of the eighties and nineties every now and then there flash glimmerings of golden dreams, stirring forecasts about life in two hundred, three hundred or a thousand years' time, for the sake of which we must all suffer now, about new inventions thanks to which people will be able to fly, and about the discovery of the sixth sense.

And have you noticed how often the audience laughs during a Chekhov play, the sort of gay, ringing laughter that one never hears at other plays? When Chekhov gets on to vaudeville he develops the funny situation to the level of an hilarious bouffe.

And what about his letters? The general mood of sadness does not escape me, of course, when I read them. But against this background, like stars twinkling blithely on the night horizon, shine witty phrases, amusing comparisons, and enormously funny descriptions.

Often this does not stop at tomfoolery and we are treated to anecdotes and jokes by the born jester and comic who lived in the heart of Antosha Chekhonte, and subsequently also in the heart of the ailing and weary Chekhov.

When a healthy person is gay and cheerful, this is natural, normal. But when a sick man, who has pronounced the death sentence on himself (for Chekhov was a doctor) and who is fettered like a convict to a place he hates, far from his relatives and friends, deprived of so much as a glimmer of hope to comfort him in the way ahead, is nevertheless able to laugh and find inspiration in noble dreams and faith in the future, to be concerned with amassing cultural riches for future generations, this ability to enjoy life, this vitality, deserve to be acknowledged as something remarkable, exclusive and way above the norm.

I find it even harder to understand why Chekhov is regarded as old-fashioned in our day and why it is thought that he would not have understood the revolution and the new life created by it.

It would, of course, be ridiculous to deny that Chekhov's age was very remote in spirit from the present day and the new generations nurtured by the revolution. In many respects they are directly opposed to each other. It is also obvious that present-day, revolutionary Russia, with its vigour in destroying the old foundations of life and creating new ones, does not accept and cannot even understand the inertia of the eighties, with their passive, temporising languor.

There was no soil for a revolutionary upsurge amid the stifling stagnancy in the air at that time... Only here and there, underground, were people preparing and gathering strength for the mighty blows. The work of the most progressive people was simply to prepare the mood of society, to implant new ideas and explain the deficiencies of the old life. And Chekhov was at one with those who were carrying out this preparatory work. He was able, like few others, to portray the intolerable atmosphere of stagnation and ridicule the vulgarity of the life which it produced.

Time marched on. And Chekhov, constantly striving ahead, could not lag behind. On the contrary, he evolved with life and the age.

As the atmosphere grew more tense and revolution drew closer he became more and more resolute. Those who think him weak-willed and indecisive, like many of the characters whom he described, are quite wrong. As I have already said, he frequently surprised us by his firmness, determination and decisiveness.

"It's terrible! But it must be done. Let's hope the Japanese wake us up," Chekhov told me, agitatedly, but with firm conviction, when Russia began to smell of gunpowder.

Among the men of letters at the end of the last century and beginning of the present one he was one of the first to sense the inevitability of revolution, when it was still only in embryo and society was continuing to wallow in extravagances. He was one of the first to sound the alarm. Who, if not he, began to cut down the glorious, flowering cherry orchard, realising that it had had its day and that the old life was irrevocably condemned to demolition.

A person who sensed well in advance a great deal of what has now come to pass would have been able to accept everything he had predicted.

But perhaps the actual devices of Chekhov's writing and work are too mild for the people of today? The accepted devices for portraying an outstanding revolutionary on the stage calls for dramatically effective and energetic protest, bold denunciation, menacing demands. And there is none of this in Chekhov's work, it is true. But that does not make his work any the less convincing or powerful in its impact.

In his appeals to build a new life Chekhov often uses the rule of contraries. He says that here's a fine chap, and there's another one and a third, all nice people, leading a good life, and their shortcomings are charming and amusing. But taken all in all everything is tedious, useless, irritating and moribund. What is to be done? We must join forces and change everything, strive for a different and better life.

In those who do not grasp, do not understand this about Chekhov I sense a blinkered vision, a lack of perception and imagination with its flights and dips into the essence of a work of art. This is the result of a prosaic, middle-class attitude towards art, which robs the latter of its main strength.

We, artists of the stage, also frequently approach a writer's work with middle-class demands and highlight what is least important in it.

The scenic portrayal of Chekhov's dream should be done in relief. The play's leitmotiv should be heard throughout. But unfortunately Chekhov's dream is more difficult to convey on the stage than the external life of the play and its everyday detail. This is why the main motif is frequently relegated to the background in the theatre, and the ordinary life aspect comes too vividly into the foreground. This shift of emphasis is often the fault not of the stage director

but of the actors themselves. Ivanov is acted as an ordinary neurotic, for example, which makes the audience feel nothing but pity for a sick man. In fact, however, Chekhov portrayed him as a strong personality who fights for a better society. But Ivanov cracks too—he is broken in the unequal struggle with the harsh conditions of Russian life. The tragedy of the play is not that the main hero has a breakdown, but that the conditions of life are intolerable and require radical reform. Give this part to an actor with great inner strength and you will not recognise Chekhov, or, to be more precise, you will see him for the first time as he should be. Give Lopakhin in *The Cherry Orchard* the range of a Chaliapin, and young Anna the temperament of a Yermolova, and let the former cut down what has become obsolete with all his strength, and let the young girl, who with Petya Trofimov senses the approach of a new age, cry out for all the world to hear: "Greetings, new life!"—and you will realise that *The Cherry Orchard* is alive and relevant today, that in it Chekhov's voice rings out bold and stirring because he himself is looking forward instead of back.

Among Chekhov's many faces, as with any playwright, there is one turned directly towards the stage and us, the actors. This is the purely theatrical elements and principles, his interpretation of the purpose of our art, its nature, technique, devices for writing drama, and so on. In this professional sphere of our art, apart from all tendencies or socio-political tasks, it is not so important *what* the writer writes or *what* the actor acts, as *how* they do it. And we specialists in the field of acting and production would do well to study the late writer from this—his dramatic, scenic and artistic aspect.

Has this been done? Which actor has studied Chekhov's dramatic technique, with its new devices, scope for stage direction and that special scenic quality, unknown before Chekhov, which demands a new actor's psychology and self-awareness? Which of us has gone really deeply into Treplev's monologue on the new art? Are actors familiar with these commandments? Of course, they've learnt to trot them out by heart like the Lord's Prayer, but have they ever thought about the inner meaning concealed beneath the words?

"It really is surprising," Maurice Maeterlinck once said to me, "how little actors are interested in their art, its technique, its philosophy, acting skill and virtuosity."

Those actors who make conceited and superior remarks about Chekhov's being old-fashioned, have simply not yet reached his level. They are the ones who are out-of-date in our art, they are the ones



who would dismiss Chekhov contemptuously, through lack of understanding or sheer laziness. But without mounting all the rungs on the ladder of our art it is impossible to advance further through the stages of its natural, organic development.

Chekhov is one of the milestones along the road of our art, which has been marked by Shakespeare, Molière, the great Schroeder, Pushkin, Gogol, Shchepkin, Griboyedov, Ostrovsky and Turgenev. Having studied Chekhov and mastered his position, we shall await a new guide who will feel his way to a new stage of the endless path, traverse it with us and plant a new milestone for future generations of actors. From there, from the newly-won fort, broad horizons will open up for the way ahead.

The works of those who, like Chekhov, plant milestones, will outlive the generations, not be outlived by them. The themes treated by writers grow old, lose their topicality, and cease to interest those for whom historic perspective does not exist. But real works of art do not die or lose their poetic value because of this. And even if that Chekhovian *what* has grown old and is unacceptable for the post-revolutionary period—in some works—the Chekhovian *how* has not even begun to live a full life in our theatres.

For this reason the chapter on Chekhov is not yet finished. It has not yet been read properly and gone into thoroughly. The book has been closed too early.

Let it be opened again, studied fully and read to the end.

# PLAYS



# THE SEAGULL

*A comedy in four acts*

## CHARACTERS

IRINA ARKADINA, an actress

KOSTYA TREPLEV, her son

PYOTR SORIN, her brother

NINA ZARECHNAYA, the daughter of a wealthy landowner

ILYA SHAMRAYEV, a retired army lieutenant who manages  
Sorin's estate

POLINA, his wife

MASHA, his daughter

BORIS TRIGORIN, a writer

YEVGENY DORN, a doctor

SEMYON MEDVEDENKO, a schoolmaster

YAKOV, a workman

COOK

MAID

The action takes place in Sorin's country-house. There is an interval  
of two years between the third and fourth acts.

## ACT ONE

The grounds on Sorin's estate. A broad avenue leading to a lake. A makeshift stage for amateur theatricals has been erected across the avenue, obscuring the view of the lake. There are bushes on either side of the stage. A few chairs and a small table.

The sun has just set. Yakov and some other workmen are on the makeshift stage behind the curtain. Hammering and coughing. Masha and Medvedenko enter left, returning from a walk

MEDVEDENKO. Why do you always wear black?

MASHA. I'm in mourning for my life. I'm unhappy.

MEDVEDENKO. But why? (*Musingly.*) I can't understand it. You're in good health. Your father may not be rich, but he's fairly comfortably off. I have a much harder life than you. I earn a miserable twenty-three roubles a month, and that's before my superannuation is deducted. But I don't go around in mourning. (*They sit down.*)

MASHA. It's not a question of money. People can be poor and still be happy.

MEDVEDENKO. In theory they can, but in practice it works out like this. There's me, my mother, my two sisters and my young brother, living on twenty-three roubles a month. We have to eat and drink, don't we? And what about tea and sugar? And tobacco? You just try and make ends meet.

MASHA (*looking round at the stage*). The play will begin soon.

MEDVEDENKO. Yes. It's been written by Kostya and Nina's going to act in it. They're in love with each other, and today their souls will entwine to mould a single artistic image. But for your soul and mine there are no points of contact. I love you. I can't stay at home because I miss you so much. Each day I walk four miles here and four miles back and all I get from you is indifferentism. That's only to be expected, of course. I haven't any money, and ours is a large family. Who'd want to marry a man who hasn't enough to eat?

MASHA. That's rubbish. (*Takes a pinch of snuff.*) I'm touched by your affection, but I can't return it and that's that. (*Offers him the snuff-box.*) Will you have some?

MEDVEDENKO. No, thank you. (*Pause.*)

MASHA. How close it is. There'll probably be a storm tonight. You're always philosophising or going on about money. You believe there's nothing worse than being poor, but I think it's a thousand times easier to walk round in rags and tatters and beg for your living than. . . . But never mind, you wouldn't understand. . . .

Sorin and Kostya enter right

SORIN (*leaning on his walking stick*). I never feel at home in the country and I'll never get used to living here now, of course. I went to bed at ten yesterday and woke up this morning at nine feeling as if my brains had got stuck to my skull or something, with all that sleeping. (*Laughs.*) And after lunch I dropped off again, so now I'm really done for. It's a bit of a nightmare, eh, what?

KOSTYA. Yes, you ought to live in the town. (*Catches sight of Masha and Medvedenko.*) You'll be called when it's about to begin, everybody, but you mustn't stay here now. Would you mind going away, please.

SORIN (*to Masha*). Do ask your father to let the dog off its chain. It does howl so. My sister had another sleepless night.

MASHA. Ask him yourself. I'm not going to. Spare me that, please. (*To Medvedenko.*) Shall we go?

MEDVEDENKO (*to Kostya*). You will send someone to tell us when it's going to begin, won't you? (*Exit both.*)

SORIN. That means the dog will be howling all night long again. Well, as I was saying, I've never lived the way I wanted to in the country. I'd take a month's leave and come down here for a good rest and all that, then things would start going wrong and I'd want to be off as soon as I'd arrived. (*Laughs.*) I was always happy to leave. But now I've retired and I don't know what to do with myself, er, what? Got to put up with it, whether I like it or not.

YAKOV (*to Kostya*). We're going for a swim, sir.

KOSTYA. Alright, but make sure you're back in ten minutes. (*Looks at his watch.*) We're due to begin soon.

YAKOV. Yes, sir. (*Exit.*)

KOSTYA (*looking round the stage*). There's a theatre for you! Just a curtain, two wings, and then open space. Not a bit of scenery. A view straight onto the lake and the far horizon. We'll raise the curtain at half past eight exactly, when the moon rises.

SORIN. Splendid.

KOSTYA. If Nina is late, the whole effect will be spoiled, of course. She should be here already. Her father and stepmother keep such a close eye on her, it's as difficult for her to slip away as if she were in prison. (*Straightens his uncle's tie.*) Your hair and beard are a mess. Shouldn't you get them trimmed?

SORIN (*combing his beard*). That's the tragedy of my life. I've always looked as if I drank like a fish, even in my young days. The women never went for me. (*Sits down.*) Why is my sister in such a bad mood?

KOSTYA. Why? She's bored. (*Sits down beside him.*) She's jealous. She's already got it in for me, and the

performance, and my play, because Nina's acting in it and not her. She doesn't know the play, but she already hates it.

SORIN (*laughing*). Your're imagining things, really.

KOSTYA. She's annoyed, because Nina will be applauded on this tiny stage, and not her. (*Looks at his watch.*) She's a psychological oddity, my mother. She's gifted, intelligent, capable of weeping over a book, reciting the whole of Nekrasov by heart and looking after the sick like an angel; but just try praising Duse in front of her. Oh, no! You must praise her alone, write about her only, or rave about her superb acting in *La Dame aux camélias* or *The Haze of Life*. But since there's none of that heady liquor here, in the country, she's bored and irritable, and we're all her enemies, we're all to blame. She's superstitious, too, afraid of three candles and the number thirteen. And she's mean. I know for a fact that she's got seventy thousand in a bank in Odessa. But ask her for a loan and she'll burst into tears.

SORIN. You've got it into your head that your mother doesn't like your play, so you're all upset. Calm down, lad. Your mother adores you.

KOSTYA (*picking the petals off a flower*). She loves me—she loves me not. (*Laughs.*) See, my mother loves me not. And why should she? She wants to enjoy herself, to have love affairs and wear bright, frilly blouses. But I'm twenty-five and a constant reminder to her that she's not young anymore. She's thirty-two when I'm not around and forty-three when I am, and she hates me for it. And she knows I don't think much of the theatre. She loves the theatre. She thinks she is serving humanity, serving the sacred cause of art, but to my mind the theatre of today is nothing but stale convention. When the curtain goes up under artificial light, on a room with three walls, and these great geniuses, these high priests of the sacred art, show people eating, drinking, making love and wearing the latest fashions; when they try to squeeze a moral out of the tritest scenes and phrases, a wretched little moral that's easily grasped and handy about the house; when I'm dished up with the same old thing, over and over again, in a thousand variations—I run away as fast as I can. just

like Maupassant ran away from the Eiffel Tower because it disgusted him so with its vulgarity.

SORIN. We can't do without the theatre.

KOSTYA. New forms are what we need. New forms, and if there aren't any, we'd be better off without anything at all. (*Looks at his watch.*) I love my mother, very much; but she leads such a stupid life, always running around with that writer of hers, and her name constantly bandied about in the papers. I find it so tiresome. Sometimes I get selfish, I'm only human after all and wish that my mother wasn't a famous actress at all, and imagine that if she were just an ordinary woman I should be happier. Can you think of a more hopeless and ridiculous situation, Uncle? She would have a room full of visitors, all celebrities, stage people and writers, and I would be the only person there who was a nobody, tolerated only because I was her son. Who am I? What am I? I left university in my third year due to circumstances beyond our control, as they say, without any special gifts and without a penny of my own. My papers describe me as lower middle class, born in Kiev. My father was also from Kiev, lower middle class, although he was a famous actor. Anyway, when all these stage people and writers in her drawing-room graciously bestowed their attention on me, I felt their glances were measuring my insignificance, I guessed at what they were thinking and was terribly humiliated. . . .

SORIN. By the way, what sort of fellow is that writer? I can't make him out. Never says a word.

KOSTYA. He's intelligent, unaffected, and a bit melancholic. A very decent chap. He's still off forty, but he's already famous and doing very nicely, thank you. As for his writing, well . . . how shall I put it? It's nice and gifted, but after Tolstoi or Zola you don't feel like reading Trigorin.

SORIN. You know, lad, I'm very fond of writers. At one time there were two things I wanted passionately: to get married and to be a writer. But I didn't manage to do either. No. And it must be quite nice to be even a very minor writer, eh, what?

KOSTYA (*listening*). I hear footsteps. . . . (*Hugs his uncle.*) I can't live without her. Even the sound of her



footsteps is music. I'm so insanely happy! (*Hurries to meet Nina Zarechnaya.*) My enchantress, my dream. . . .

NINA (*agitatedly*). I'm not late, am I? Of course, I'm not. . . .

KOSTYA (*kissing her hands*). No, no, no!

NINA. I've been worried all day, so frightened. I was afraid father wouldn't let me come. But then he went out with my stepmother. There was a red sky and the moon was just rising. I drove the horse as hard as I could. (*Laughs.*) But I'm so glad to be here. (*Shakes hands warmly with Sorin.*)

SORIN (*laughing*). Looks as though you've been crying, my dear. Now then! We can't have that.

NINA. Yes, I have. See how out of breath I am. I have to leave in half an hour, so we must hurry. And please don't try to stop me. Father doesn't know I'm here.

KOSTYA. Yes, it really is time we started. Someone must go and get the others.

SORIN. I'll go. Straightaway. (*Exit right singing.*) "Two grenadiers to France did march". . . . (*Looks round.*) Once I started singing like that and the public prosecutor, one of my colleagues, said: "You've got a powerful voice there, Sorin." . . . Then he thought for a bit and added: "But it's a pretty awful one, too." (*Exit laughing.*)

NINA. My father and his wife won't let me come here. They say you're all a lot of bohemians. They're afraid I'll go on the stage. But I feel drawn to the lake, like a seagull. My thoughts are all of you. (*Looks round.*)

KOSTYA. We're alone.

NINA. I think there's someone over there. . . .

KOSTYA. No, there isn't. (*A kiss.*)

NINA. What sort of tree is that?

KOSTYA. An elm.

NINA. Why is it so dark?

KOSTYA. It's evening, everything gets dark then. Please don't leave early, I beg you.

NINA. I must.

KOSTYA. Then what if I come to your place, Nina? I'll stand in the garden all night gazing at your window.

NINA. You mustn't. The night-watchman would notice you. Tresor isn't used to you yet. He'd bark.

KOSTYA. I love you.

NINA. Shush.

KOSTYA (*hearing footsteps*). Who's that? Is it you, Yakov?

YAKOV (*behind the stage*). Yes, sir.

KOSTYA. Everyone in their places. It's time to start. Is the moon rising?

YAKOV. Yes, sir.

KOSTYA. Have you got the meths? And the sulphur? There must be a smell of sulphur when the red eyes light up. (*To Nina.*) You can go now, everything's ready for you there. Are you nervous?

NINA. Yes, very. Your mother's alright. I'm not afraid of her. But Trigorin's here. I feel so terrified and ashamed of acting in front of him . . . a famous writer. Is he young?

KOSTYA. Yes.

NINA. What marvellous stories he writes.

KOSTYA (*coldly*). I wouldn't know. I haven't read them.

NINA. It's hard acting in your play. There are no real live people in it.

KOSTYA. Real live people! We have to show life as we see it in our dreams, not as it is, or as it ought to be.

NINA. There's so little action in it. It's all monologue. And I think a play should always have some love in it. (*They both go off-stage.*)

Enter Polina and Dorn

POLINA. It's getting damp. Do go back and put your galoshes on.

DORN. I'm too hot.

POLINA. You don't look after yourself properly. It's sheer obstinacy. You're a doctor and you know perfectly well that damp air is bad for you, but you want to make me worry. You spent the whole evening on the terrace yesterday on purpose.

DORN (*sings*). "Oh do not say your youth was ruined forever."

POLINA. You were so carried away by your conversation with Irina Arkadina that you didn't notice the cold. You find her attractive, don't you? Admit it.

DORN. I'm fifty-five.

POLINA. So what? That's not old for a man. You're still in fine form and women still find you attractive.

DORN. Well then?

POLINA. You're all dying to kiss the ground that actress treads on. All of you!

DORN (*sings*). "Once more I stand before you" . . . It's in the nature of things for people to admire actors and actresses and to treat them differently from tradesmen, say. It's idealism.

POLINA. The ladies were always falling in love with you and running after you. Was that idealism too?

DORN (*shrugging his shoulders*). What of it? There was a lot of good in what they felt for me. They loved me mainly because I was a good doctor. Ten or fifteen years ago I was the only decent obstetrician in the whole district, remember. And what's more, I've always been a fairly honest person.

POLINA (*grasping his hand*). My dearest!

DORN. Shush. They're coming.

*Enter Irina Arkadina with her arm through Sorin's, Trigorin, Shamrayev, Medvedenko and Masha*

SHAMRAYEV. She was magnificent at the Poltava Fair in 1873. Absolutely splendid. Marvellous acting. Do any of you happen to know what became of that comic actor Chadin, Pavel Chadin? He was excellent as Raspluyev, even better than Sadovsky. I'll swear to it, dear lady. What's become of him now?

ARKADINA. You keep asking me about these ancient old fogies. How should I know! (*Sits down.*)

SHAMRAYEV (*sighing*). Old Pavel Chadin! You don't get actors like that these days. The theatre's not what it used to be, dear lady. It was fine oak trees then, but now it's only old stumps.

DORN. It's true there aren't many really great people on the stage today, but the average actor has reached a far higher level.

SHAMRAYEV. I can't agree. Still, it's a matter of taste. *De gustibus aut bene, aut nihil.*

*Kostya enters from behind the stage*

ARKADINA (*to her son*). When's it going to begin, dear boy?

KOSTYA. In a minute. Please try to be patient.

ARKADINA (*reciting from Hamlet*).

"Oh, Hamlet, speak no more!

Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul;  
And there I see such black and grained spots  
As will not leave their tinct."

KOSTYA (*from Hamlet*).

"And let me wring thy heart, for so I shall,  
If it be made of penetrable stuff."

A horn sounds behind the stage

KOSTYA. Ladies and gentlemen. The play is about to begin. Your attention please! (*Pause.*) I'll start now. (*Bangs with a stick and recites loudly.*) O venerable shades of yore, who hover o'er this lake by night, lull us to sleep and send us dreams of what will be two hundred thousand years from now!

SORIN. Two hundred thousand years from now there will be nothing.

KOSTYA. Then let them show us that nothing.

ARKADINA. Yes, let them. We're lulled to sleep alright.

The curtain rises, revealing the view of the lake; the moon on the horizon is reflected in the water; Nina Zarechnaya, all in white, is sitting on a large boulder

NINA. Men, lions, eagles and partridges, the antlered deer, geese, spiders, the silent fish inhabiting the deep, the starfish and those creatures which the eye could not see—in short, all living things, have completed their sad cycle and expired. For many thousands of years the earth has not borne a single living creature, and this poor moon now lights in vain its lantern. The cranes no longer awake with a cry in the meadows, and the cockchafers are not to be heard in the lime groves. It is cold, cold, cold. It is empty, empty, empty. It's fearful, fearful, fearful. (*Pause.*) The bodies of all living things have turned to dust. Eternal matter has transformed them into rocks, water and clouds, and all their souls have merged into one. And I, I am the soul of the whole world. Within me

lie the souls of Alexander the Great, Caesar, Shakespeare, Napoleon, and the vilest leech. Within me human minds have merged with animal instincts, and I remember all, all, all, and live each life within me anew. (*Will-o'-the-wisps appear.*)

ARKADINA (*in a low voice*). This is something in the Decadent line.

KOSTYA (*imploring reproachfully*). Mother!

NINA. I am alone. Once in a hundred years I open my mouth to speak, and my voice rings desolate in the void, and no one hears it. . . . You too, pale lights, hear me not. . . . Born of the stagnant marsh before daybreak, you wander listlessly till dawn, yet without thought, without will, without the quivering of life. Fearing lest life should emerge in you, the Devil, father of Eternal Matter, produces a change of atoms in you each moment, as in the rocks and water, and you are in constant flux. The spirit alone remains constant and immutable in the universe. (*Pause.*) Like a captive cast into a deep and empty well, I know not where I am nor what awaits me. I know only that I am destined to conquer in a fierce and bitter battle with the Devil, the principle of material force, and then matter and spirit shall blend in perfect harmony and the Kingdom of the Cosmic Freedom shall come. But this will come to pass only when the moon, and bright Sirius, and the earth shall turn to dust slowly over many, many millennia. . . . And until then—horror, horror, horror. . . . (*Pause; two red eyes appear against the background of the lake.*) Lo, my powerful adversary, the Devil, approaches. I see his fearsome, crimson eyes. . . .

ARKADINA. There's a smell of sulphur. Is that right?

KOSTYA. Yes.

ARKADINA (*laughing*). There's an effect for you.

KOSTYA. Mother!

NINA. He is bored without man. . . .

POLINA (*to Dorn*). You've taken your hat off. Put it on again, or you'll catch cold.

ARKADINA. The doctor's taken off his hat to the Devil, the father of eternal matter.

KOSTYA (*loudly, in a rage*). The play's over. Stop! Curtain!

# Ч А Й К А

Драма в 4-х действиях, сочин. Антона Чехова.

ПОЛНЯЮТ РОЛИ: Тригорина — Н. С. Станиславский, Треплев — В. З. Ивановский, Сорина — В. В. Луцкий, Шамраев — А. Р. Мухоморов, Маши — М. П. Лилина, Полина — Е. Я. Голубева, Захаров — А. Л. Захаров, Швабрина — А. Н. Андреев, Пьеро — А. Л. Захаров.

Парни и прически Я. Павлова. Декоративные украшения цвѣтн садаго заведеніи О. Носа.

Режиссеры К. С. Станиславскій и Вл. И. Немировичъ-Данченко.

Исполнители: Дорна—А. Андреевны—Е. М. Раевская, Горичной—М. П. Николаев.

Медведь—Л. А. Тихомир.




О. Л. Кипперъ, Зарѣной—М. Л. Р.

**Начало въ 7½ ч. веч., окончаніе около 11½ ч. ночи.**

Лица, записавшіяся на первое представленіе драмы „Чайка“, благоволятъ получить билеты до 4-хъ час. Среды, 16-го Декабря, послѣ чего они поступаютъ въ общую продажу.

Въ Пятницу, 18-го Декабря, второе представленіе драмы:

**ЦѢНА МѢСТЪ**

[illegible]

Programme for the première of *The Seagull*  
in the Moscow Art Theatre on December 17,  
1898

MOSCOW ART THEATRE PRODUCTION OF *THE SEAGULL* (1923) DIRECTOR:  
STANISLAVSKY AND NEMIROVICH-DANCHENKO



Kostya—V. E. Meyerhold, Dorn—  
A. L. Vishnevsky



Nina—M. L. Roksanova, Trigorin—  
K. S. Stanislavsky





Sorin—V. V. Luzhsky, Kostya—  
V. E. Meyerhold, Nina— M. L. Roksanova



Polina—E. M. Rayevskaya, Dorn—  
A. L. Vishnevsky

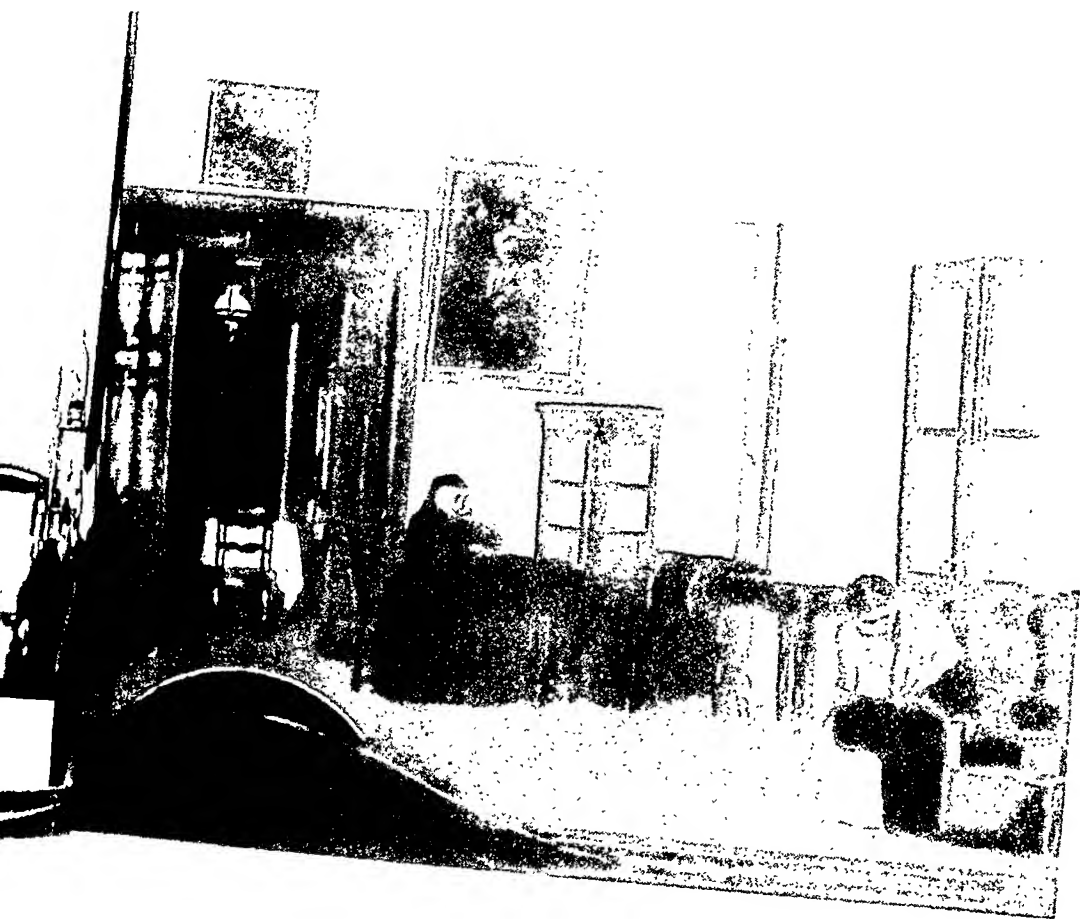


Arkadina—O. L. Knipper, Sorin—  
V. V. Luzhsky



Arkadina—O. L. Knipper, Trigorin—  
K. S. Stanislavsky





*Scenes from Act IV*







MOSCOW ART THEATRE PRODUCTION OF *THE SEAGULL* (1955)  
DIRECTOR: LIVANOV

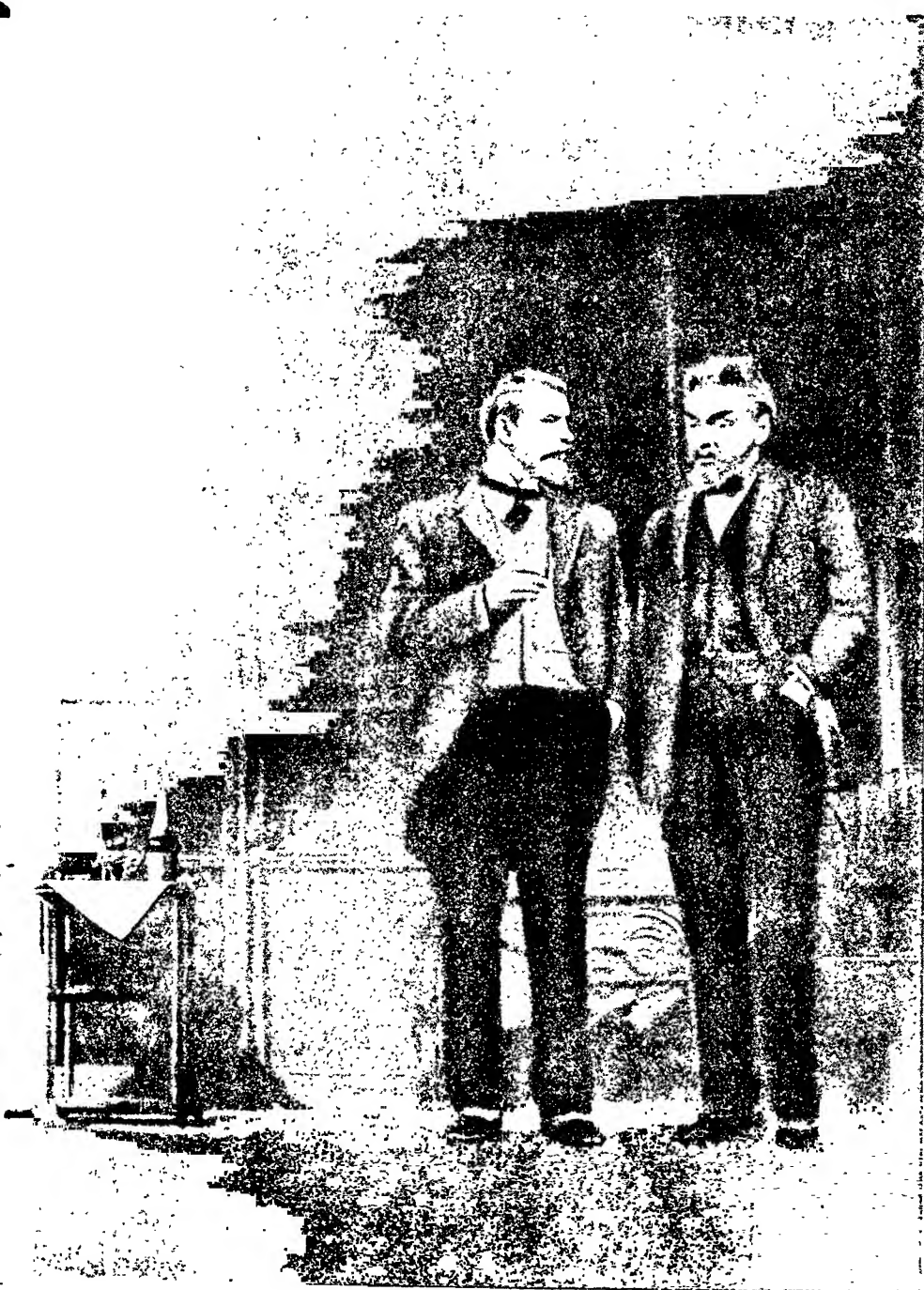


Nina—S. I. Korkoshko, Kostya—  
O. A. Strizhenov



Arkadina—A. I. Stepanova, Trigorin—  
L. I. Gubanov





Scene from Act IV



Nina—S. I. Korkoshko, Kostya—  
O. A. Strizhenov

MINISTERUL ÎNVAȚĂMÎNȚII ȘI ȘTIINȚEI  
GRIGORE BRĂNCUȘ - ADRIANA IONESCU MANUELA SARA

ARKADINA. What are you angry about?

KOSTYA. Stop! Curtain! Bring down the curtain! (*Stamping.*) Curtain! (*The curtain falls.*) I'm sorry! I forgot that only a select few are allowed to write plays and act on the stage. I've interfered with their monopoly. I ... I ... (*Is about to say something else, but gives a hopeless wave of the hand and goes off left.*)

ARKADINA. What's the matter with him?

SORIN. Irina, my dear, you really shouldn't hurt a young man's pride like that.

ARKADINA. But what did I say to him?

SORIN. You offended him.

ARKADINA. He told us himself that it was a joke, so I treated the play like a joke.

SORIN. All the same, though. . . .

ARKADINA. But now it turns out that he has written a magnum opus! How do you like that! So he put on this performance and sprayed us all with sulphur for our edification, not as a joke. He wanted to show us how to write and how to act. This is becoming tedious. These constant jibes and digs at me, if you please! They'd be enough to infuriate anyone! He's a wilful conceited boy.

SORIN. He wanted to please you.

ARKADINA. Is that so? Then why didn't he choose an ordinary play, instead of making us listen to this Decadent rubbish. I'm quite prepared to listen to rubbish as well, for a joke, but this claims to introduce new forms, a new era in art. If you ask me, what we're dealing with here is bad temper, not new art forms.

TRIGORIN. Everyone writes what he wants and what he can.

ARKADINA. Let him write what he wants and what he can, as long as he leaves me alone.

DORN. Thou art angry, Jupiter, . . .

ARKADINA. I'm not Jupiter, I'm a woman. (*Lights a cigarette.*) And I'm not angry. I'm just annoyed that a young man should spend his time in such a tiresome way. I didn't want to offend him.

MEDVEDENKO. There are no grounds for distinguishing between spirit and matter, because spirit may be all the material atoms put together. (*Animatedly, to Trigorin.*)

You know what, somebody ought to write a play about the life of a schoolmaster. It's a hard one, I can tell you.

ARKADINA. Quite so, but let's not talk any more about plays or atoms. It's such a heavenly evening! Listen, everyone. Can you hear singing? (*Listens.*) How delightful!

POLINA. It's on the other side of the lake. (*Pause.*)

ARKADINA (*to Trigorin*). Sit down beside me. Ten or fifteen years ago there was music and singing here by the lake almost every night. There are six estates on its shores. I remember the laughter, the noise, the shooting—and all the love affairs. The *jeune premier* and idol on all those estates was—allow me to introduce him—(*nodding towards Dorn*) Doctor Yevgeny Dorn. He's charming enough now, but in those days he was quite irresistible. Oh dear, my conscience is starting to trouble me. Why did I hurt my poor boy? I'm so worried. (*Loudly.*) Kostya! Kostya, darling!

MASHA. I'll go and look for him.

ARKADINA. Yes, be an angel.

MASHA: (*walking off left*). Kostya! Halloo! (*Exit.*)

NINA (*emerging from behind the stage*). It looks as though we're not going to continue, so I'd better come out. Good evening, everybody. (*Kisses Arkadina and Polina.*)

SORIN. Bravo! Bravo!

ARKADINA. Bravo! Bravo! You were superb. With your looks and that divine voice it's a sin to bury yourself in the country. You're bound to have talent. You really ought to go on the stage, you know.

NINA. Oh, it's my one dream! (*Sighs.*) But it will never come true.

ARKADINA. Who knows? Now allow me to introduce Boris Trigorin to you.

NINA. Oh, I'm so delighted . . . (*Confused.*) I always read your books. . . .

ARKADINA (*sitting her down beside them*). Don't be shy, my dear. He's a celebrity, but he's simple enough at heart. Look, he's embarrassed too.

DORN. I assume we can have the curtain raised now. It's a bit eery like that.

SHAMRAYEV (*loudly*). Yakov, get the curtain up, will you! (*The curtain goes up.*)

NINA (*to Trigorin*). It's a strange play, isn't it?

TRIGORIN. I didn't understand a word. But I enjoyed watching it. You acted so sincerely. And the set was splendid. (*Pause.*) There must be a lot of fish in this lake.

NINA. Yes.

TRIGORIN. I'm very fond of fishing. There's nothing I enjoy more than sitting on a bank in the late afternoon and watching a float.

NINA. I should have thought that for anyone who has experienced the joy of creative work, no other pleasures could exist.

ARKADINA (*laughing*). Don't talk to him like that. He's always at a loss when people say pretty things to him.

SHAMRAYEV. I remember the great Silva singing lower C one night at the Bolshoi in Moscow. As luck would have it, the bass from our parish church was in the gallery. You can imagine our amazement when we suddenly heard "Bravo, Silva!" a whole octave lower from up there. Like this (*sings in a low bass*) "Bravo, Silva!" There was a deathly hush in the audience. (*Pause.*)

DORN. Listen to the silence.

NINA. It's time I went. Good-bye.

ARKADINA. Where? It's so early. We won't let you go yet.

NINA. My father is waiting for me.

ARKADINA. What a man, really. *\*(They embrace.)* Oh well, it can't be helped. But it's a pity to let you go.

NINA. If only you knew how hard it is for me to go.

ARKADINA. Someone should see you home, my sweet.

NINA (*frightened*). Oh, no!

SORIN (*imploring her*). Do stay!

NINA. I can't.

SORIN. Stay for one more hour and that's all. You really...

NINA (*after a moment's thought, tearfully*). I mustn't! (*Shakes hands with him and goes out quickly.*)

ARKADINA. She's been very unlucky, you know. They say her late mother left the whole of her vast fortune to her husband, everything down to the last kopeck. And now



the girl has nothing, because her father has already made a will leaving everything to his second wife. It's disgraceful.

DORN. Yes, her dear father is a scoundrel of the first order, to give him his due.

SORIN (*rubbing his hands to warm them*). Let's go inside, too, everybody. It's getting damp. My legs are aching.

ARKADINA. They're like wooden sticks, they can hardly walk. Alright, come along, poor old man. (*Takes his arm.*)

SHAMRAYEV (*offering his arm to his wife*). Madam?

SORIN. I can hear that dog howling again. (*To Shamrayev.*) Please tell them to let it off the chain.

SHAMRAYEV. I can't do that. I'm afraid of thieves breaking into the barn. I've got millet in there. (*To Medvedenko who is walking next to him.*) Yes! "Bravo, Silva", a whole octave lower. And he was just a simple church chorister, not a great singer.

MEDVEDENKO. How much does a church chorister earn?

Exit everyone except Dorn

DORN (*alone*). I don't know. Perhaps I'm just stupid or a bit mad, but I liked the play. It's got something. When that girl was talking about loneliness and when Satan's red eyes appeared, my hands were shaking with emotion. It was fresh and unaffected. That looks like him now. I want to tell him something nice about it.

KOSTYA (*entering*). There's no one left.

DORN. I'm here.

KOSTYA. Masha's been hunting for me all over the park, the wretched creature.

DORN. I enjoyed your play tremendously, Kostya. It's rather strange and I did not hear the end, but it impressed me very much. You've got talent. You must go on writing. (*Kostya shakes his hand warmly and embraces him impulsively.*) Goodness, how overwrought you are. There are tears in your eyes. What I want to say is this. You took your subject from the sphere of abstract ideas. That was quite right, because a work of art must express an important idea. Only serious things can be beautiful. How pale you are!

KOSTYA. So you think I ought to carry on?

DORN. Yes. . . . But you must only portray things that are important and eternal. I've led a full life, you know, and I've been discriminating. I'm quite content, but if I were to feel the ecstasy that artists experience while creating, I think I would despise my material frame and everything that goes with it and soar away higher and higher from the earth.

KOSTYA. Excuse me, but where is Nina?

DORN. And remember this too. Every work of art must have a clear and definite idea. You must know why you are writing. Otherwise, if you walk along this picturesque path without a definite aim, you'll get lost and your talent will be the ruin of you.

KOSTYA (*impatiently*). Where is Nina?

DORN. She's gone home.

KOSTYA (*in despair*). What am I to do? I want to see her. I must see her. I'll go after her. . . .

Enter Masha

DORN (*to Kostya*). Calm down, my friend.

KOSTYA. I will go. I must go.

MASHA. Go into the house, Kostya. Your mother's waiting for you. She's worried.

KOSTYA. Tell her I've gone. And I beg you, all of you—leave me alone and don't follow me around.

DORN. Come now, my dear boy. That's not right. You can't behave like that.

KOSTYA (*tearfully*). Good-bye, Doctor. And thank you. . . (*Exit.*)

DORN (*sighing*). Youth! Youth!

MASHA. That's what people always say when they can't think of anything better. (*Takes a pinch of snuff.*)

DORN (*takes the snuff-box away from her and throws it into the bushes*). Filthy stuff! (*Pause.*) Someone's playing the piano. We'd better go indoors.

MASHA. Wait a moment.

DORN. What is it?

MASHA. I want to tell you again. I want to talk to you. (*Agitatedly.*) I don't love my father, but I have some affection for you. For some reason, I feel instinctively

that I can trust you. Please help me. Help me, or else I'll do something silly. I'll make a mess of my life and ruin it. I can't go on like this. . . .

DORN. What is it? How can I help?

MASHA. I'm suffering. Nobody knows how I'm suffering. (*Rests her head on his chest, softly.*) I love Kostya.

DORN. How nervy everyone is! And how much love there is about! It's that magical lake! (*Gently.*) But what can I do, my child? What can I do?

### *Curtain*

## ACT TWO

A croquet lawn. In the background on the right is a house with a large terrace. On the left is the lake sparkling with a reflection of sunlight. Flower-beds. It is midday and hot. Arkadina, Dorn and Masha are sitting on a bench in the shade of an old lime tree near the lawn. Dorn has an open book on his lap

ARKADINA (*to Masha*). Let's get up. (*They both rise.*) Now stand next to me. You are twenty-two and I'm almost twice that. Which of us looks the younger, Doctor?

DORN. You, of course.

ARKADINA. There you are. And why is that? Because I work, I feel, I'm always busy. But you just stick around in the same old place. You don't really live at all. My rule is never look into the future. I never think about old age or death. What is to be, will be.

MASHA. And I feel as if I had been born long, long ago, and I'm dragging my life behind me like an endless train. Often I don't have the slightest desire to go on living. (*Sits down.*) That's all a lot of rubbish, of course. One ought to pull oneself together and forget about it.

DORN (*sings quietly*). "Tell her, my flowers". . . .

ARKADINA. What is more, I'm as meticulous about my appearance as an Englishman. I keep a tight rein on myself, as they say, my dear. My dress and hair are always impeccable. Would I ever dream of going out of the house, even into the garden, in a dressing gown or without doing my hair? Certainly not. That's how I've

kept so young-looking, by never being sloppy and letting myself go, like some people. (*Walks up and down the lawn, her hands on her hips.*) There you are—as trim as can be. I could play a girl of fifteen.

DORN. Well, all the same, I'll go on. (*Picks up the book.*) We had got up to the corn merchant and the rats....

ARKADINA. Yes, the rats. Read us some more. (*Sits down.*) No, give me the book and I'll read instead. It's my turn. (*Takes the book and looks for the place.*) The rats.... Ah, here it is. (*Reads.*) "And of course it is as dangerous for society people to pamper writers as it is for corn merchants to breed rats in their granaries. Yet they are the object of great attention. Thus, when a woman has chosen a writer whom she wishes to captivate, she besieges him with compliments, flattery and favours...." Well, that may be the French way, but there's nothing like that here, no plans of action. With us a woman usually falls head over heels in love with a writer before she decides to captivate him. No need to look far. Take me and Trigorin, for example.

Sorin enters, leaning on his walking stick, with Nina beside him; Medvedenko follows wheeling a bath-chair

SORIN (*fondly, as to a child*). Really? So we've had a nice surprise, have we? We're feeling happy today, are we? (*To his sister.*) What a nice surprise we've had! Father and stepmother have gone off to Tver, and now we are free for the next three days.

NINA (*sits down beside Arkadina and embraces her.*) I'm so happy! Now I belong to you.

SORIN (*sitting down in his bath-chair*). She looks so pretty today.

ARKADINA. Very elegant and charming. What a clever girl you are. (*Kisses Nina.*) But we mustn't praise you too much or it will bring bad luck. Where is Mr Trigorin?

NINA. He's fishing by the bathing hut.

ARKADINA. I can't understand why he doesn't get tired of it. (*Prepares to continue reading.*)

NINA. What is that?

ARKADINA. Maupassant's *Sur l'eau*, my pet. (*Reads a few lines to herself.*) The next bit is boring and not true anyway. (*Closes the book.*) I'm so worried. Tell me, what's the matter with my son? Why is he so moody and bad-tempered? He spends whole days down by the lake and I hardly ever see him.

MASHA. He's unhappy. (*To Nina, timidly.*) Would you recite us something from his play.

NINA (*shrugging*). Do you really want me to? It's so dull.

MASHA (*trying to restrain her rapture*). When he reads, his eyes flash and his face turns pale. He has the most beautiful, sad voice and the manner of a poet.

Sorin snores

DORN. Sweet dreams.

ARKADINA. Pyotr!

SORIN. Eh?

ARKADINA. Were you asleep?

SORIN. Certainly not.

Pause

ARKADINA. You're not getting any medical attention, Pyotr. That's bad.

SORIN. I'd be glad to have some medicine, but the doctor won't give me any.

DORN. Medicine at the age of sixty!

SORIN. You still want to go on living at the age of sixty.

DORN (*irritably*). Well, take valerian drops then.

ARKADINA. I think it would do him good to go to a spa.

DORN. Why not? Let him go, if he likes. Or not go, if he doesn't.

ARKADINA. What are we supposed to make of that?

DORN. Nothing at all. It's all perfectly clear.

Pause

MEDVEDENKO. Mr Sorin should give up smoking.

SORIN. Nonsense.

DORN. No, it's not nonsense. Wine and tobacco make you lose your personality. After a cigar or a glass of

vodka you're no longer Pyotr Sorin, but Pyotr Sorin plus somebody else. Your real self gets lost and you think of yourself in the third person, as "he".

SORIN (*laughing*). It's all very well for you to talk. You've lived your life to the full. But what about me? I worked for twenty-eight years in the Department of Justice, but I've never really lived, never experienced anything, eh, what? So naturally enough I want to feel that I'm living. You're satisfied and indifferent, that's why you tend to be philosophical. But I want to live, so I drink sherry at dinner and smoke cigars and all that. There you are.

DORN. Life is something to be taken seriously. To ask for treatment at the age of sixty and complain that you didn't enjoy yourself enough when you were young is downright irresponsible, begging your pardon.

MASHA (*getting up*). It must be about time for lunch. (*Walks off languidly and limply*). My leg's got pins and needles. (*Exit.*)

DORN. She's gone to knock back a couple of drinks before lunch.

SORIN. The poor girl's so unhappy.

DORN. Nonsense, sir.

SORIN. You talk like a man who's had his fill of life.

ARKADINA. Ah, what could be more boring than this delightful country boredom! The heat, the quiet, the idleness and the philosophising. It's nice being here with you, my friends, pleasant listening to you ... but how much nicer to be learning a part in a hotel room.

NINA (*rapturously*). Oh, yes! How I understand you.

SORIN. Of course it's better in town. You sit in your room, and the footman doesn't let anyone in unannounced, and there's a telephone ... and cabs outside and all that.

DORN (*sings*). "Tell her, my flowers"....

Enter Shamrayev followed by Polina

SHAMRAYEV. Here they are. Good morning, everybody! (*Kisses Arkadina's hand, then Nina's.*) Delighted to see you looking so well. (*To Arkadina.*) My wife tells me that you and she are thinking of going to town today. Is that correct?

ARKADINA. Yes.

SHAMRAYEV. Hm. That's splendid, but how will you get there, dear lady? We're bringing in the rye today, and all the men are busy. What horses will you take, begging your pardon?

ARKADINA. What horses? How on earth should I know what horses?

SORIN. But we have carriage horses.

SHAMRAYEV (*angrily*). Carriage horses? And where am I going to get the harness for them? Tell me that! It's incredible! It's quite beyond me! My dear lady! Forgive me. I have the greatest admiration for your talent and would gladly sacrifice ten years of my life for you, but I can't let you have any horses!

ARKADINA. But what if I must go? Well, really!

SHAMRAYEV. My dear lady! With respect, you don't know what it means to run an estate.

ARKADINA (*angrily*). The same old story! In that case I'm leaving for Moscow today. Tell them to hire horses for me in the village or I shall walk to the station.

SHAMRAYEV (*angrily*). In that case I resign. Find yourself another manager. (*Exit.*)

ARKADINA. Each summer it's the same thing, each summer I get insulted here! I'll never set foot in the place again! (*Exit left in the direction of the bathing hut. A moment later she is seen entering the house, followed by Trigorin who is carrying fishing rods and a bucket.*)

SORIN (*angrily*). The impudence of it. Well, I never! I've had enough of this. Have all the horses brought here this very minute.

NINA (*to Polina*). Fancy refusing Irina Arkadina, a famous actress! Surely her slightest wish, or even caprice, should be more important than your farming? It's incredible.

POLINA (*in despair*). What can I do? Put yourself in my position. What can I do?

SORIN (*to Nina*). Let's go to my sister. We'll all beg her not to leave, eh? (*Looking in the direction in which Shamrayev went off.*) Insufferable man! Despot!

NINA (*stopping him from getting up*). You stay where you are. We'll take you along. (*She and Medvedenko wheel the bath-chair.*) Oh, how dreadful it all is.

SORIN. Yes, quite dreadful. But he won't go. I'll have a word with him. *(They go out leaving only Dorn and Polina.)*

DORN. People are tiresome. Your husband should really be thrown out of here by the scruff of his neck, but it will end up with that old woman Pyotr Sorin and his sister apologising to him. You'll see.

POLINA. He's even put the carriage horses to work in the fields. Every day there's some sort of squabble like this. If you only knew how it upsets me. I feel quite ill. See, I'm trembling all over. I can't stand his bad manners. *(Imploringly.)* Yevgeny, my dearest, my darling, let me come and live with you. Time is running out, we're not young anymore, at least we could spend what time is left without lying and concealing things. *(Pause.)*

DORN. I'm fifty-five. It's too late for me to change my way of life.

POLINA. I know you're refusing because there are other women in your life apart from me. You can't have them all living with you. I realise that. Forgive me. I know I'm a nuisance.

Nina appears near the house; she is picking flowers

DORN. No, you're not.

POLINA. I get so jealous. You're a doctor, of course, and you can't help seeing women. I realise that. . . .

DORN *(to Nina, who is approaching them)*. What's happening?

NINA. Madam Arkadina is crying and her brother has got an attack of asthma.

DORN *(getting up)*. I'd better go and give them both some valerian drops.

NINA *(hands him the flowers)*. These are for you.

DORN. Merci bien. *(Walks off to the house.)*

POLINA *(accompanying him)*. What pretty flowers! *(By the house, in a hollow voice.)* Let me have those flowers. Come on. *(He hands them over and she tears them to pieces and throws them away. They both go into the house.)*

NINA *(alone)*. How strange to see a famous actress crying, and over such a trifle, too. And isn't it funny that



a famous writer, who is idolised by the public and written about in all the newspapers, whose portraits are sold everywhere and whose books are translated into foreign languages, should spend all day fishing and be overjoyed at catching two chub. I thought famous people were proud and inaccessible, that they despised the mob and by the fame and glory of their name somehow took revenge on the mob, which puts high birth and riches above all else. But here they are—crying, fishing, playing cards, laughing and getting angry, like anyone else.

KOSTYA (*comes in hatless, with a gun and a dead seagull*). Are you alone?

NINA. Yes.

Kostya lays the seagull at her feet

NINA. What does that mean?

KOSTYA. I did a dreadful thing today—I killed a seagull. I'm laying it at your feet.

NINA. What's the matter with you? (*Picks up the seagull and looks at it.*)

KOSTYA (*after a pause*). I'll soon kill myself in the same way.

NINA. I simply don't recognise you.

KOSTYA. Yes, but only since I stopped recognising you. You've changed towards me, your eyes are cold, and my presence obviously embarrasses you.

NINA. You've grown so irritable lately and keep expressing yourself in incomprehensible symbols. I suppose this seagull is a symbol, too, but I'm afraid I don't understand it. . . . (*Puts the seagull on the bench.*) I'm not clever enough to understand you.

KOSTYA. It all began that evening when my play was such a stupid flop. Women never forgive failure. I've burnt everything, down to the last scrap of paper. If only you knew how miserable I am. Your coldness is terrible. I can't believe it. It's like waking one morning and finding that the lake has dried up or its waters have disappeared into the ground. You say you're not clever enough to understand me. But what is there to understand? My play was a flop, so now you despise my inspiration and regard me as a nobody, like hundreds of others.

(*Stamping.*) How well I realise that! It's as if a nail has been driven into my brain. Curse it and the pride that is sucking away at my lifeblood like a serpent. (*He sees Trigorin approaching, reading a book.*) Here comes the real genius. Walking like Hamlet and with a book, too. (*Mimicking.*) "Words, words, words!" The sun has not yet reached you, but you are already smiling. Your gaze has melted in its rays. I won't disturb you. (*Goes off quickly.*)

TRIGORIN (*making jottings in a notebook*). Takes snuff and drinks vodka.... Always in black.... The schoolmaster is in love with her....

NINA. Good morning, Mr Trigorin.

TRIGORIN. Good morning. It turns out that we may have to leave here today unexpectedly. It is unlikely that you and I will ever meet again. I don't get much chance to meet young girls, interesting young girls. I've already forgotten and can't conjure up clearly what it feels like to be eighteen or nineteen. That's why the young girls in my novels and stories are usually rather unconvincing. I would like to change places with you, even if it were just for an hour, to find out what you are thinking, what makes you tick.

NINA. And I should like to change places with you.

TRIGORIN. Why?

NINA. To find out what it feels like to be a famous, gifted writer. What's it like to be a celebrity? What do you feel about being famous?

TRIGORIN. Me? Well, nothing in particular. I've never thought about it. (*Thinking.*) Either you must be exaggerating my fame, or it's something one doesn't feel at all.

NINA. But say you read about yourself in the newspapers?

TRIGORIN. It's nice when they praise you, but you feel upset for a day or two after a bad review.

NINA. What a wonderful world! If only you knew how I envy you! How different people's destinies are! Some people hardly manage to keep going in their boring, insignificant lives, which are all very much alike and all unhappy; but others, like you, for example, and you are one in a million, have been destined to lead interest-

ing, splendid lives full of meaning. How lucky you are!

TRIGORIN. Me? (*Shrugging.*) Hm. You talk about fame, happiness and a splendid, interesting life, but for me all these fine words are like candied fruit which I never eat. You're very young and very sweet.

NINA. Your life is marvellous.

TRIGORIN. What's so marvellous about it? (*Looks at his watch.*) I must go and do some writing now. Excuse me, I haven't much time. (*Laughs.*) You've touched a very sore spot, as they say, and now I'm getting anxious and slightly irritable. But alright, let's have a talk. Let's talk about my wonderful, splendid life. Where shall we begin? (*Thinks for a while.*) You know what an *idée fixe* is, when a person thinks about nothing but the moon, say, all the time. Well, I have my own moon. Day and night I am obsessed by a single compulsive thought: I must write, I must write, I must. . . . No sooner have I finished one novel, than I have to write another one, for some reason, then a third, and after that a fourth. I write all the time, without a break. I can't help it. What's so wonderful and splendid about that, eh? It's a ghastly life. Here I am enjoying being with you, yet all the time my thoughts are on the unfinished novel which awaits me. I look at that cloud shaped like a grand piano. And make a mental note to mention a cloud like that somewhere in a story. There's a scent of heliotrope. I make another note: sickly perfume, blossoms the colour of widow's weeds, include in description of summer evening. I grab at each phrase, each word that you or I are uttering and hurry to lock them up in my writer's larder, just in case they may come in handy. When I finish work, I dash off to the theatre or go fishing in the hope of relaxing and forgetting about everything. But no! Some heavy iron weight is already beginning to stir in my brain—a new subject—so I'm driven back to my desk and forced to start writing again. It's like that all the time. I give myself no peace, and I feel that I am devouring my own life, that to obtain the honey which I give to some remote person, I am gathering pollen from my finest flowers, then plucking the flowers themselves and trampling on their roots. I must be mad, mustn't I? How can

my friends and dear ones treat me like a normal person? "What are you writing now?" "What are you going to surprise us with next?" The same old thing, all the time. And I have the feeling that all this attention from others, all this praise and adulation, is nothing but deception. I'm being deceived, like a sick person, and I'm sometimes afraid that someone will steal up on me from behind and carry me off to an asylum, like Poprishchin\*. In my young, best years, when I was just beginning, writing was constant torment to me. A minor writer, particularly when he's not very lucky, feels clumsy, awkward and superfluous. His nerves are constantly frayed and on edge. He feels drawn to the company of people connected with literature and the arts and hangs around them, unrecognised and unnoticed, afraid to look them straight in the eye, like an inveterate gambler who has no money. I could not see my readers, but for some reason I imagined them to be hostile and suspicious. I was afraid of the public. It terrified me, and whenever a new play of mine was put on, I felt that the dark-haired members of the audience were hostile and the fair-haired ones indifferent. How dreadful it all was! What torment!

NINA. Yes, but surely inspiration and the actual process of writing must give you some moments of ecstasy and happiness?

TRIGORIN. Yes, I like writing. And I like reading the proofs, but the moment the thing is published I can't stand it. I see that it's all wrong, a mistake, that I should never have written it at all, and I feel angry and wretched. (*Laughs.*) Then the public reads it and says: "Yes, charming, talented, but nowhere near Tolstoi", or "Excellent, but not as good as Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*". And that's how it will be until my dying day—charming and talented—and nothing else. And when I die my friends will walk past my grave and read the words: "Here lies Trigorin. A good writer, but not as good as Turgenev".

NINA. I'm sorry but I refuse to accept that. You've simply been spoiled by success.

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\* The main character in Gogol's *Diary of a Madman*.

TRIGORIN. What success? I've never thought much of myself. Never liked myself as a writer. The worst of it is that I live in a sort of haze and often don't understand what I'm writing. I'm very fond of this lake, for example, the trees and the sky. I have a real feeling for nature. It awakens passion in me and the overwhelming desire to write. But I'm not just a landscape painter. I'm a citizen of my country as well. I love my native land and its people.

I feel that as a writer I have a duty to write about my people, their suffering and their future, about science, the rights of man and so on. So I scribble on about everything, always in a rush, harried and criticised on all sides. And I veer from side to side like a fox with the hounds hot at his heels. And I see that life and science are leaping ahead and I am lagging behind like a man who has missed his train, and eventually I realise that all I can do is paint landscapes and everything else I write is false to the very core.

NINA. You've been working too hard, and you haven't the time or the inclination to recognise your own importance. You may be dissatisfied with yourself, but for others you are great and wonderful. If I were a writer like you, I'd have dedicated all my life to the mob, but I would have realised that they could be happy only by trying to reach my level, and they would have drawn me along in a chariot.

TRIGORIN. A chariot! Who do you think I am? Agamemnon? *(They both smile.)*

NINA. For the happiness of being a writer or an actress I would endure the displeasure of my family, poverty and disappointment, live in an attic, eat nothing but brown bread, and suffer agonies from the realisation of my own inadequacy, but in return I would demand fame—real, resounding fame. *(Covers her face with her hands)*. Oh, I feel dizzy.

ARKADINA'S VOICE *(from the house)*. Boris!

TRIGORIN. They're calling me. To pack, I suppose. I really don't want to leave. *(Looks round at the lake)*. What a marvellous spot! How nice it is here!



E. G. Stenberg's sketch for one of the sets  
in the 1968 production



NINA. Do you see that house and garden on the other bank?

TRIGORIN. Yes.

NINA. It belonged to my mother when she was alive. I was born there. I've lived here all my life, by this lake, and I know every tiny island on it.

TRIGORIN. It's a fine place! (*Notices the seagull.*) What's this?

NINA. A seagull. Kostya killed it.

TRIGORIN. A fine bird. I really don't want to leave here. Try to persuade Irina Arkadina to stay, eh? (*Makes a note in his book.*)

NINA. What are you writing?

TRIGORIN. Just a note or two. Had an idea for a story. (*Puts the book away.*) An idea for a short story: a young girl like you has been living all her life by a lake. She loves it like a seagull and is as free and happy as a seagull. Then a man happens to come along, sees her and destroys her just for the fun of it, like this seagull.

Pause. Arkadina appears in the window

ARKADINA. Boris, where are you?

TRIGORIN. Just coming. (*Walks away, then turns to look at Nina; to Arkadina up at the window.*) What is it?

ARKADINA. We're staying.

Trigorin goes into the house

NINA (*goes up to the footlights; after a moment's reflection*). I must be dreaming.

*Curtain*

### ACT THREE

The dining-room in Sorin's house. Doors right and left. A side-board. A medical cupboard. A table in the middle of the room. A trunk and hat boxes; signs of impending departure. Trigorin is having breakfast. Masha is standing by the table

MASHA. I'm telling you all this because you're a writer. You can use it if you like. I assure you frankly,



if he had hurt himself badly I wouldn't have gone on living for another minute. All the same I've got courage. I've made up my mind once and for all to tear this love out of my heart, by the very roots.

TRIGORIN. And how will you do that?

MASHA. I'm getting married. To Medvedenko.

TRIGORIN. The schoolmaster?

MASHA. That's right.

TRIGORIN. I don't quite see the need for that.

MASHA. What's the point of loving without hope, waiting years on end for something. There won't be any time for love when I get married. New cares will drive out the old ones. And anyway it'll be a change, you know. Shall we have another?

TRIGORIN. Do you think we should?

MASHA. Oh, come on. (*Pours them both a glass.*) Don't look at me like that. Women drink far more than you think. But only a few drink openly, like me. The rest do it on the sly. Yes. And it's vodka or brandy. (*She clinks glasses with him.*) Here's to you. You're a nice person. I'm sorry to be saying good-bye to you. (*They drink.*)

TRIGORIN. And I'm sorry to be going.

MASHA. Well, why don't you ask her to stay?

TRIGORIN. No, she won't stay now. Her son is behaving most tactlessly. First he tries to shoot himself and now they say he wants to challenge me to a duel. Whatever for? He sulks and snarls and goes on about new forms. But there's room for everything—the old and the new. Why all this pushing and shoving?

MASHA. I suppose it's jealousy, too. But that's none of my business.

Pause. Yakov crosses the stage from left to right with a suitcase.  
Nina enters and stands by the window

MASHA. My schoolmaster's not all that bright, but he's a good man and a poor one, and he loves me very much. I'm sorry for him. And for his old mother. Well, I wish you all the very best. Don't think badly of me. (*Shakes his hand warmly.*) Thank you for being so kind

to me. Send me your books and be sure to autograph them. But don't write anything formal. Just "To Masha, who does not know where she belongs or what she is living for". Good-bye. (*Goes out.*)

NINA (*holding out a clenched fist to Trigorin*). Odd or even?

TRIGORIN. Even.

NINA (*sighing*). No. There's only one pea in my hand. I was trying to find out whether to go on the stage or not. I wish someone would advise me.

TRIGORIN. That's something you'll have to decide for yourself. (*Pause.*)

NINA. You're going away and—I don't suppose we shall see each other again. I'd like you to take this little medallion as a keepsake. I've had your initials engraved on it—and the title of your book *Days and Nights* on the other side.

TRIGORIN. How charming! (*Kisses the medallion.*) What a lovely present.

NINA. Think of me sometimes.

TRIGORIN. I will. I shall picture you as you were on that bright sunny day. Remember? A week ago when you were wearing that white dress . . . and we talked . . . and that white seagull was lying on the bench.

NINA (*pensively*). Yes, the seagull. . . . (*Pause.*) We must stop talking, there's someone coming. Give me two minutes before you go, I beg you. (*Exit left; at the same time Arkadina enters with Sorin who is wearing a frock-coat with a medal on it, followed by Yakov who is busy with the packing.*)

ARKADINA. You'd do better to stay at home, old boy. You can't go round visiting with your rheumatism. (*To Grigorin.*) Who was that? Nina?

TRIGORIN. Yes.

ARKADINA. So sorry to have disturbed you. (*Sits down.*) Well, I think I've packed everything. I'm exhausted.

TRIGORIN (*reading the inscription on the medallion*). *Days and Nights*, page 121, lines 11 and 12.

YAKOV (*clearing the table*). Shall I pack your fishing rods too, sir?

TRIGORIN. Yes, I shall be needing them again. But you can give the books away.

YAKOV. Yes, sir.

TRIGORIN (*to himself*). Page 121, lines 11 and 12. What can be in those lines? (*To Arkadina*). Are there any of my books in the house?

ARKADINA. In my brother's study. The bookcase in the corner.

TRIGORIN. Page 121. . . . (*Exit.*)

ARKADINA. Really, Pyotr, you should stay at home.

SORIN. You're leaving. It will be miserable here without you.

ARKADINA. And what will there be in town?

SORIN. Nothing in particular, but all the same. (*Laughs.*) There'll be laying the foundation stone for County Hall and that sort of thing. I'd just like to get away from this wretched life for a bit. I've been hanging around here too long, like an old cigarette holder. I've ordered the horses for one, and we'll leave together.

ARKADINA (*after a pause*). Now you stay here and don't be miserable, and don't catch cold. Keep an eye on my son. Look after him. Teach him how to behave. (*Pause.*) Here am I going away without knowing why Kostya tried to shoot himself. I think the main reason was jealousy, and the sooner I take Trigorin away from here the better.

SORIN. I'm not so sure. There were other reasons as well. It's understandable enough. A clever young man living in the country, miles from nowhere, with no money, no status in society and no prospects. Nothing to occupy him. Ashamed and afraid of his idleness. I'm extremely fond of him and he's very attached to me, but all the same he feels as if he doesn't belong here, as if he's cadging, living on charity. It's his pride . . . understandable enough. . . .

ARKADINA. Oh, what a worry he is to me! (*Thinks.*) Perhaps he should get a job in the civil service, or something. . . .

SORIN (*whistles, then hesitantly*). I think the best thing would be if you were to . . . give him a little money. In the first place he needs some decent clothes and all

that. Just look at him! He's been wearing the same old jacket for three years, and he hasn't got an overcoat. (*Laughs.*) And he ought to get out and enjoy himself a bit. Travel abroad, or something. It doesn't cost that much.

ARKADINA. Well, I don't know. I might manage a new suit, but going abroad. . . . No, I can't afford the suit either at the moment. (*Firmly.*) I haven't got the money.

Sorin laughs

ARKADINA. I haven't!

SORIN (*whistles*). I see. Forgive me, my dear, and don't be angry. I believe you. You're a warm-hearted, generous woman.

ARKADINA (*bursting into tears*). I haven't got the money.

SORIN. If I had the money, I'd give it him myself, of course, but I haven't a bean. (*Laughs.*) The manager takes all my pension and spends it on farming, cattle-breeding and bee-keeping, so it disappears into thin air. The bees die, the cattle die, and I can never have the horses when I want them.

ARKADINA. Well, actually I do have some money. But I'm an actress. I have to spend the earth on clothes.

SORIN. You're sweet and kind. I know you are. Yes. Oh dear, I feel funny again. (*Sways.*) Come over all dizzy. (*Holds on to the table.*) I feel quite ill, eh, what?

ARKADINA (*frightened*). Pyotr! (*Tries to support him.*) Pyotr, my dear! (*Shouts.*) Help! Help!

Enter Kostya with a bandage round his head and Medvedenko

ARKADINA. He's ill.

SORIN. It's nothing. (*Smiles and drinks some water.*) Better already, eh, what?

KOSTYA (*to his mother*). Don't be frightened, mother, it's nothing serious. Uncle often gets these attacks nowadays. (*To his uncle.*) You ought to lie down, Uncle.

SORIN. Yes, I will for a bit. But I'm still going to town. I'll have a lie-down, then off we go. Understandable enough. (*Walks off, leaning on his stick.*)

MEDVEDENKO (*takes his arm*). Do you know this

riddle? What goes on four legs in the morning, two in the afternoon, three in the evening. . . .

SORIN (*laughs*). That's right. And on its back at night. Thank you, but I can manage on my own.

MEDVEDENKO. Now then. Don't stand on ceremony. (*He and Sorin go off.*)

ARKADINA. How he frightened me!

KOSTYA. It's bad for his health living in the country. He gets depressed. If you suddenly had a fit of generosity, mother, and lent him about two thousand roubles, he would be able to spend a whole year in town.

ARKADINA. I have no money. I'm an actress, not a banker.

Pause

KOSTYA. Change my bandage, mother. You do it so well.

ARKADINA (*takes some iodine and a box of bandages out of the medicine cupboard*). The doctor's late.

KOSTYA. Yes. He promised to be here by ten, and it's twelve already.

ARKADINA. Sit down. (*Removes his bandage.*) You look as if you're wearing a turban. Yesterday someone dropped by in the kitchen and asked what nationality you were. It's almost healed, you know. There's nothing much left now. (*Kisses him on the head.*) I hope you won't do any more bang-bang when I've gone?

KOSTYA. No, mother. It was in a moment of insane despair, when I couldn't control myself. It won't happen again. (*Kisses her hand.*) You've got magic hands. I remember a long time ago when you were still acting in the state theatres. I was just a little boy then. There was a fight in the yard, and one of the tenants, the washer-woman, got badly hurt. Remember? They carried her away unconscious. And you went to see her several times and took medicine to her, and washed her children in a tub. Surely you remember that!

ARKADINA. No, I don't. (*Bandaging his head.*)

KOSTYA. Two ballerinas were living in the same block as us and they used to come over and have coffee with you.

ARKADINA. I remember that.

KOSTYA. They were very religious. (*Pause.*) These last few days I've loved you as gently and tenderly as I did when I was a child. I've no one at all except you now. But why, why has that man got such a hold on you, mother?

ARKADINA. You don't understand him, Konstantin. He's a man of very high principles. . . .

KOSTYA. Yet when he learnt that I was proposing to challenge him to a duel his high principles did not stop him from behaving like a coward. He's leaving. Running away.

ARKADINA. What nonsense! It was I who asked him to leave.

KOSTYA. A man of high principles! Here are you and I almost quarrelling about him, while he's in the drawing-room or the garden laughing at us—and chatting up Nina, trying to persuade her that he's a genius.

ARKADINA. You delight in saying unpleasant things to me. I respect that man and would ask you not to say a bad word about him in my presence.

KOSTYA. And I don't respect him. You want me to regard him as a genius, too. Sorry, but I can't lie. His writing makes me sick.

ARKADINA. That's sheer jealousy. What else can they do—people who have no talent, but a very high opinion of themselves—except turn up their noses at real genius? But it's poor consolation.

KOSTYA (*ironically*). Real genius! (*Angrily.*) If it comes to that, I've got more talent than all of you put together. (*Pulls the bandage off his head.*) You're a lot of stick-in-the-mud old conservatives who've got hold of monopoly on art and think that only what you do is legitimate and real. Everything else you choke and stifle. I don't recognise you! I don't recognise you or him!

ARKADINA. You Decadent!

KOSTYA. Go off to your nice little theatre and act in your miserable third-rate plays!

ARKADINA. I've never acted in third-rate plays. Leave me alone. You're not even capable of writing a wretched vaudeville. Kiev middle class! You sponger!

KOSTYA. You miser!

ARKADINA. You tramp!

Kostya sits down and begins to cry quietly

ARKADINA. You nobody! (*Paces up and down excitedly, then stops.*) Don't cry. You mustn't cry. (*Begins to cry too.*) You mustn't. . . . (*Kisses his forehead, cheeks and head.*) My dear, dear child. Forgive me! Forgive your sinful mother! Forgive an unhappy woman!

KOSTYA (*embraces her*). If you only knew. I've lost everything. She doesn't love me, I can't write anymore. I've got nothing to live for.

ARKADINA. Don't despair. Everything will be alright. He's going away, and she'll love you again. (*She wipes his tears.*) That's enough. We've made it up now, haven't we?

KOSTYA (*kisses her hands*). Yes, mother.

ARKADINA (*tenderly*). Make it up with him, too. There's no need for a duel. Is there now?

KOSTYA. Alright. But please don't make me meet him, mother. That would be too much. It's so hard. . . . (*Trigorin enters.*) There he is. I'm going. (*Quickly puts the dressings back in the cupboard.*) The doctor will do the bandage.

TRIGORIN (*looking through the book*). Page 121 . . . lines 11 and 12. . . . Here we are. (*Reads.*) "If you should ever need my life, come and take it."

Kostya picks up the bandage from the floor and goes out

ARKADINA (*glancing at her watch*). The horses will soon be here.

TRIGORIN (*to himself*). If you should ever need my life, come and take it.

ARKADINA. You've finished packing, I hope?

TRIGORIN (*impatiently*). Yes, yes. (*Musing.*) This innocent cry, why does it sound so sad to me? Why does it tug at my heartstrings? If you should ever need my life, come and take it. (*To Arkadina.*) Let's have one more day here.

Arkadina shakes her head

TRIGORIN. One more day.

ARKADINA. I know what's keeping you here, darling, but do try to control yourself. You're a little intoxicated. Sober up.

TRIGORIN. You be sober too, please. Be sensible and reasonable, I beg of you. Look on all this as a true friend. (*Presses her hand.*) You're capable of making sacrifices. Be a friend. Let me go. . . .

ARKADINA (*greatly agitated*). Are you that fascinated?

TRIGORIN. I feel drawn to her. Maybe it's exactly what I need.

ARKADINA. The love of a provincial girl? How little you know yourself!

TRIGORIN. People sometimes walk in their sleep. That's how I am now. I'm talking to you, but I feel as if I were asleep and dreaming of her. I'm full of sweet and wonderful dreams. Let me go. . . .

ARKADINA (*trembling*). No, no. I'm just an ordinary woman like any other. You mustn't talk to me like that. Don't torment me, Boris. It's terrible.

TRIGORIN. You could be extraordinary, if you wanted to. A love that is young, entrancing and poetical, that carries you away into the world of dreams, this alone can give one happiness on earth. I've never known such a love yet. I was too busy in my youth, hanging around editorial offices and struggling against poverty. But now here it is. This love has come at last and is beckoning me. Why should I run away from it?

ARKADINA (*angrily*). You've taken leave of your senses.

TRIGORIN. What if I have?

ARKADINA. You've all conspired to torment me today! (*Cries.*)

TRIGORIN (*clasping his head*). She can't understand. She won't understand.

ARKADINA. Am I really so old and ugly that you feel free to talk to me about other women? (*Embraces and kisses him.*) You're mad! My wonderful, marvellous man! The last page in my life! (*Gets down on her knees.*) My joy, my pride, my happiness! (*Embraces his knees.*)



If you leave me for as much as an hour, I'll never survive. I'll go mad, my wonderful one, my magnificent man, my master.

TRIGORIN. Someone might come in. (*Helps her up.*)

ARKADINA. Let them. I'm not ashamed of my love for you. (*Kisses his hands.*) My treasure! My reckless boy! So you want to go running wild, but I won't let you. I won't. (*Laughs.*) You're mine! Mine! This forehead, these eyes, this beautiful silky hair. You're all mine. You're so clever and gifted, the best writer of our day, Russia's only hope. You've so much sincerity, simplicity, freshness and full-blooded humour. You can paint a person or a landscape with a single stroke. Your characters are so alive. Reading your books is sheer delight. Do you think this is just hero-worship? Or flattery? Then look into my eyes. Come on. Do I look like a liar? You see? I'm the only one who appreciates you, the only one who tells you the truth, my sweet, wonderful Boris. You'll come with me, won't you? Yes? You won't leave me, will you?

TRIGORIN. I have no will of my own. Never have had. Weak, spineless, always submissive—can that really appeal to women? Take me, carry me away, but don't let me out of your sight for a single moment.

ARKADINA (*to herself*). Now he's mine. (*Casually, as if nothing had happened.*) But by all means stay if you like. I shall leave, but you can come on later, in a week's time. There's no particular hurry, after all.

TRIGORIN. No, we'll go together.

ARKADINA. As you like. Let's go together then....

Pause. Trigorin jots something down in his notebook

ARKADINA. What's that?

TRIGORIN. I heard a good expression this morning: "Maiden's Grove". It's bound to come in handy. (*Stretches.*) So we're going, are we? More railway carriages, station platforms, buffets, meat balls, boring conversations....

SHAMRAYEV (*enters*). I have the honour of making the sad announcement that the horses are ready. It is time to leave for the station, dear lady. The train is due

at five minutes past two. Be so kind as to do me that small favour, dear lady. Find out what has happened to the actor Suzdaltsev. Whether he's still alive and in good health. We used to drink together. He was magnificent in *The Mail Robbery*. The tragedian Ismailov, also a remarkable personality, used to act with him at that time in Elizavetgrad, I remember. No need to hurry, dear lady, you've got another five minutes. Once they were playing a pair of conspirators in a melodrama and when they were suddenly discovered, they had to say "It's a trap", but Ismailov cried "It's a prat". (*Guffaws.*) A prat!

While he is talking, Yakov fusses with the suitcases and the maid brings Arkadina her hat, coat, umbrella and gloves. Everyone helps Arkadina to put them on. The cook peeps round the left door and then comes in hesitantly a little later. Polina enters, followed by Sorin and Medvedenko

POLINA (*carrying a small basket*). Here are some plums for the journey. They're very sweet. You might feel like something tasty.

ARKADINA. You're so kind, Polina.

POLINA. Good-bye, my dear. Do forgive us if things weren't quite as they should have been. (*Cries.*)

ARKADINA (*embracing her*). Everything was splendid, absolutely splendid. But you mustn't cry.

POLINA. Our life is slipping away.

ARKADINA. There's nothing we can do about it.

SORIN (*wearing an overcoat with a shoulder cape and a hat, carrying his stick, comes out of the door left; walking across the room*). It's time to go, sister. We mustn't be late, eh? I'm going to the carriage. (*Exit.*)

MEDVEDENKO. I'll get to the station on foot. To see you off. I'll be quick. (*Exit.*)

ARKADINA. Good-bye, my dears. All being well, we'll meet again next summer. (*The maid, Yakov and the cook kiss her hand.*) Don't forget me. (*Hands the cook a rouble.*) Here's a rouble for the three of you.

COOK. Thanking you kindly, Ma'am. And a safe journey to you. You've been very good to us.

YAKOV. God bless you, Ma'am!

SHAMRAYEV. Do honour us with a letter. It would make us so happy. Good-bye, Mr Trigorin.

ARKADINA. Where's Kostya? Tell him I'm about to leave. We must say good-bye. Think kindly of me. (*To Yakov.*) I've given a rouble to cook. It's between the three of you.

All go off right. The stage is empty. Noises of people being seen off. The maid comes back to fetch the basket of plums on the table and goes off again

TRIGORIN (*returning*). I've forgotten my cane. I think it's on the terrace. (*Walks to the door left and meets Nina, who comes in.*) It's you! We're just leaving. . . .

NINA. I felt sure we would see each other again. (*Excitedly.*) Mr Trigorin, I've made up my mind once and for all. The die is cast. I'm going on the stage. By tomorrow I'll be gone. I'm leaving my father, leaving everything, and starting a new life. I'm going to Moscow . . . like you. We shall see each other there.

TRIGORIN (*glancing over his shoulder*). Stay at the Slavyansky Bazaar. Let me know the moment you arrive. At Groholsky's house in Molchanovka Street. I must rush. . . . (*Pause.*)

NINA. One minute. . . .

TRIGORIN (*in a low voice*). You're so beautiful. What happiness to think that we shall soon meet again. (*She rests her head on his chest.*) I shall see those exquisite eyes again, that inexpressibly beautiful, tender smile . . . those sweet features, that look of angelic purity. . . . My dearest. . . . (*A long kiss.*)

### *Curtain*

Two years elapse between the third and fourth acts

## ACT FOUR

The drawing-room in Sorin's house, which has been converted into a study for Kostya. Doors right and left leading into other rooms. A French window in the centre opens onto the terrace. Apart from the usual drawing-room furniture there is a writing desk in the right-

hand corner, an ottoman by the door on the left, a bookcase, and books on the window-sills and chairs. It is evening. The room is dimly lit by a table lamp. The wind can be heard in the trees and the chimney. A watchman is tapping. Enter Medvedenko and Masha

MASHA (*calling*). Kostya! Kostya! (*Looking all round.*) There's no one here. The old man keeps asking "Where's Kostya? Where's Kostya?" He can't live without him. . . .

MEDVEDENKO. He's afraid of being alone. (*Listening.*) What terrible weather! It's been like this for nearly two days now.

MASHA (*turning up the lamp*). There are waves on the lake, enormous ones.

MEDVEDENKO. It's dark in the garden. They ought to have that old stage pulled down. It's as bare and ugly as a skeleton, and the curtain flaps in the wind. When I walked past it yesterday evening I thought I heard someone crying there.

MASHA. What next. . . . (*Pause.*)

MEDVEDENKO. Let's go home, Masha.

MASHA (*shaking her head*). I'm spending the night here.

MEDVEDENKO (*beseechingly*). Do let's go, Masha. The baby must be hungry.

MASHA. Rubbish. Matryona will feed it.

MEDVEDENKO. Poor little thing. This will be its third night running without its mother.

MASHA. How boring you've become. At least you used to talk about life before, but now it's nothing but the baby and going home all the time.

MEDVEDENKO. Let's go, Masha.

MASHA. Go yourself.

MEDVEDENKO. Your father won't give me a horse.

MASHA. Yes, he will. If you ask him.

MEDVEDENKO. I suppose I could ask him. So you'll be home tomorrow then?

MASHA (*takes a pinch of snuff*). I said so. Stop pestering me.

Enter Kostya and Polina. Kostya is carrying pillows and a blanket, and Polina some bed linen, which they put on the ottoman, Kostya then goes to his desk and sits down

MASHA. What's that for, mother?

POLINA. Mr Sorin wants his bed made up in Kostya's study.

MASHA. Let me do it. (*Makes up the bed.*)

POLINA (*sighing*). Old people are just like children. (*Goes up to the desk, leans on her elbow and looks at a manuscript. Pause.*)

MEDVEDENKO. Well, I'll be going then. Good-bye, Masha. (*Kisses his wife's hand.*) Good-bye, mother. (*About to kiss his mother-in-law's hand.*)

POLINA (*irritatedly*). Well, alright. Off you go then.

MEDVEDENKO. Good-bye, Kostya.

Kostya gives him his hand in silence; Medvedenko goes off

POLINA (*looking at the manuscript*). Nobody ever thought, ever dreamed, that you would become a real writer, Kostya. And now, thank goodness, the magazines are even beginning to send you money. (*Strokes his hair.*) And you've got so handsome. Dear, good Kostya, try to be a bit nicer to my Masha.

MASHA (*making the bed up*). Leave him alone, mother.

POLINA (*to Kostya*). She's a fine girl. (*Pause.*) All a woman wants is a little affection. I know that well enough.

Kostya gets up from his desk and leaves without a word

MASHA. Now you've made him angry. Why must you pester him, mother?

POLINA. I'm sorry for you, Masha.

MASHA. A lot of good that does.

POLINA. It makes my heart ache. I see everything and understand what's going on.

MASHA. It's all nonsense. Unrequited love is only for novels. It's rubbish. The main thing is not to give way to it, not to indulge in vain hopes. If it creeps into your heart, you must get rid of it. They've promised to transfer my husband to another district. As soon as we move I shall forget everything—I'll tear it out of my heart by the roots.

The sound of a melancholy waltz being played two rooms away

POLINA. That's Kostya playing. That means he's feeling unhappy.

MASHA (*dancing a few waltz steps silently*). The main thing is not to see him all the time. If they give my Semyon a transfer, I'll forget it all in a month, honestly. It's so silly.

The door left opens. Dorn and Medvedenko wheel in Sorin in his bath-chair

MEDVEDENKO. There are six of us at home now. And flour is seventy kopecks a pound.

DORN. Just try and make ends meet.

MEDVEDENKO. It's all very well for you to joke. You're rolling in money.

DORN. Me? In my thirty years of practice, my friend, and they were very trying years when I couldn't call a minute my own, day or night, I managed to save only two thousand, and I've just spent that on a trip abroad. So now I haven't a kopeck.

MASHA (*to her husband*). Haven't you gone yet?

MEDVEDENKO (*guiltily*). How can I, if they won't give me a horse?

MASHA (*quietly, with bitter annoyance*). I wish I'd never set eyes on you.

The chair stops in the left half of the room. Polina, Masha and Dorn sit down beside it. Medvedenko keeps his distance from them, miserably

DORN. What a lot of changes here. You've turned the drawing-room into a study.

MASHA. It's more convenient for Kostya to work here. He can go out and think in the garden, when he feels like it.

Sound of the watchman tapping

SORIN. Where's my sister?

DORN. She's gone to the station to meet Trigorin. She'll be back in a minute.

SORIN. If you sent for my sister, I must be quite seriously ill. (*After a pause.*) Funny, isn't it? Here am

I dangerously ill, but no one gives me any medicine.

DORN. Well, what would you like? Valerian drops? Bicarbonate of soda? Quinine?

SORIN. There he goes again. These doctors are sent to try us. (*Nods towards the ottoman.*) Has that been made up for me?

POLINA. Yes, Mr Sorin.

SORIN. Thank you.

DORN (*sings*). "The moon glides o'er the sky at night"....

SORIN. I want to give Kostya a subject for a novel. It should be called *The Man Who Wanted—L'homme qui a voulu*. As a young man I wanted to become a writer—and never did. I wanted to speak well—but spoke appallingly (*mimicks himself*) "and all that, sort of, er, hem". When I was trying to sum up a discussion I used to go bumble on until I broke into a cold sweat. I wanted to get married—and never did. I wanted to live in the town—and here I am living out my days in the country, and there you are.

DORN. You wanted to become a Regular State Councillor—and you did.

SORIN (*laughing*). That was something I didn't want. It just happened.

DORN. Grumbling about one's life at the age of sixty-two is not a very dignified thing to do, you must agree.

SORIN. He will have his way. I want to live, don't you understand?

DORN. That's just foolish. It's a law of nature that every life must have its end.

SORIN. You are talking as a man who's had his fill of life. You're satisfied, so you can afford to be indifferent. But when it comes to dying, you'll be afraid too.

DORN. Fear of death is an animal fear. It must be suppressed. The only people who consciously fear death are those who believe in everlasting life and are afraid because they have sinned. In the first place, you're not a believer, and in the second, what sins could you possibly have committed? You served in the Ministry of Justice for twenty-five years—and that's all.

SORIN (*laughing*). Twenty-eight....

# ХУДОЖЕСТВЕННО-ОБЩЕСТВЕННЫЙ ТЕАТРЪ

(Наретный рядъ, „Эрмитажъ“) (Наретный рядъ, „Эрмитажъ“).

**СРЕДА, 31-го ЯНВАРЯ.**

Въ первый разъ:

## ТРИ СЕСТРЫ

драма въ 4-хъ дѣйствіяхъ, соч. А. П. Чехова.

ПОЛНІТЬ РОЛИ Ольга—М. Г. Савицкая, Маша—О. Л. Кюхтеръ, Ириня—М. Ф. Андреева, Андрей—В. В. Луцкий, Наташа—М. П. Лякина, Кулыга—А. Л. Викторовскій, Веранкина—К. С. Станиславскій, Барыня Тумовъ—В. З. Мейерхольдъ, Чебушкова—А. Р. Артемъ, Соленого—М. А. Гроухъ, Анфисы—Н. А. Самарова, Ферапонта—В. Ф. Грѣбушкінъ, Рязъ—И. М. Москвитинъ, Фелюшка—І. А. Тихомировъ. Остальныя роли исполняютъ: О. П. Алексѣева, Н. С. Буткова, А. И. Андреева, Б. М. Сингиревъ, П. П. Лучкинскій, В. Н. Павлова, О. Э. Шварцъ.

Учредит. Ком. Драматическаго Театра, Федеративнаго Общества.

Режиссеры М. С. Станиславскій и В. В. Луцкий.

Декорации художника В. А. Симова. Парки и прически гримера Я. И. Кислова.

Начало въ 7½ час. вечера, окончаніе около 12 час. вечера.

Билеты все проданы.

**Четвергъ, 1-го Февраля, опентакля нѣтъ.**

Пятница, 2-го Февраля, въ 33-я разъ. «Одиночіе», др. Г. Гауптмана.

Суббота, 3-го Февраля, во 2-й разъ. «Три сестры», др. А. П. Чехова.

воскресенье, 4-го Февраля. УТРОМЪ (по уменьшен. цѣнамъ) въ 10-й разъ: «Царь Федоръ Ивановичъ», тр. гр. А. К. Толстого. Начало въ 1 ч. дня.

ВЕЧЕРОМЪ (по обыкновен. цѣнамъ) въ 16-й разъ: «Генриетта», др. Г. Гауптмана, пера Э. Э. Матеря. Начало въ 7½ ч. вечера.

Понедѣльникъ, 5-го Февраля. ВЕЧЕРОМЪ (по обыкновен. цѣнамъ) въ 3-й разъ: «Три сестры», др. А. П. Чехова. Нач. въ 7½ ч. веч.

Торникъ, 6-го Февраля. ВЕЧЕРОМЪ (по обыкновен. цѣнамъ) въ 4-й разъ: «Три сестры», др. А. П. Чехова. Нач. въ 7½ ч. вечера.

Среда, 7-го Февраля. ВЕЧЕРОМЪ (по обыкновен. цѣнамъ) въ 5-й разъ: «Три сестры», др. А. П. Чехова. Начало въ 7½ ч. вечера.

Четвергъ, 8-го Февраля. УТРОМЪ (по обыкновеннымъ цѣнамъ) въ 43-й разъ: «Смерть Іоанна Громоуна», тр. графа А. К. Толстого. Начало въ 1 ч. дня.

ВЕЧЕРОМЪ (по обыкновеннымъ цѣнамъ) въ 16-й разъ: «Ногды мы, мертвые, пробуждаемся», др. элпого Г. Ибсена. Начало въ 8 час. вечера.

Пятница, 9-го Февраля. УТРОМЪ (по обыкновен. цѣнамъ) въ 30-й разъ: «Докторъ Штокманъ», др. Г. Ибсена. Начало въ 1 ч. дня.

ВЕЧЕРОМЪ (по обыкновен. цѣнамъ) въ 6-й разъ: «Три сестры», др. А. П. Чехова. Начало въ 7½ час. веч.

Суббота, 10-го Февраля. УТРОМЪ (по обыкновен. цѣнамъ) въ 21-й разъ: «Сингурочка», пос. сказка А. Н. Островскаго. Нач. въ 1 ч. дня.

ВЕЧЕРОМЪ (по обыкновен. цѣнамъ) въ 33-й разъ: «Майна», др. А. П. Чехова. Начало въ 7½ час. вечера.

воскресенье, 11-го Февраля. УТРОМЪ (по обыкновен. цѣнамъ) въ 102-й разъ: «Царь Федоръ Ивановичъ», тр. гр. А. К. Толстого. Начало въ 1 ч. дня.

ВЕЧЕРОМЪ (по обыкновен. цѣнамъ) въ 7-й разъ: «Три сестры», др. А. П. Чехова.

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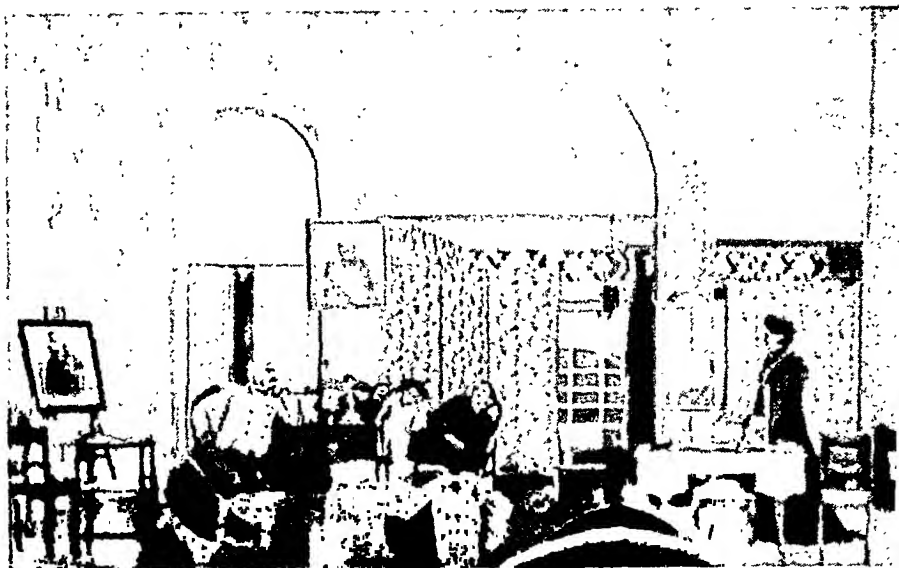
Закладующій репертуаромъ В. Н. Немировичъ-Данченко.

Programme for the première of *The Three Sisters* in the Moscow Art Theatre on January 31, 1901





Vershinin—K. S. Stanislavsky



MOSCOW ART THEATRE PRO-  
DUCTION OF *THE THREE*  
*SISTERS* (1901)  
DIRECTORS:  
STANISLAVSKY AND  
LUZHSKY



Scene from Act III



Kulygin—A. L. Vishnevsky

Olga—M. G. Savitskaya



Chebutykin—A. R. Artem

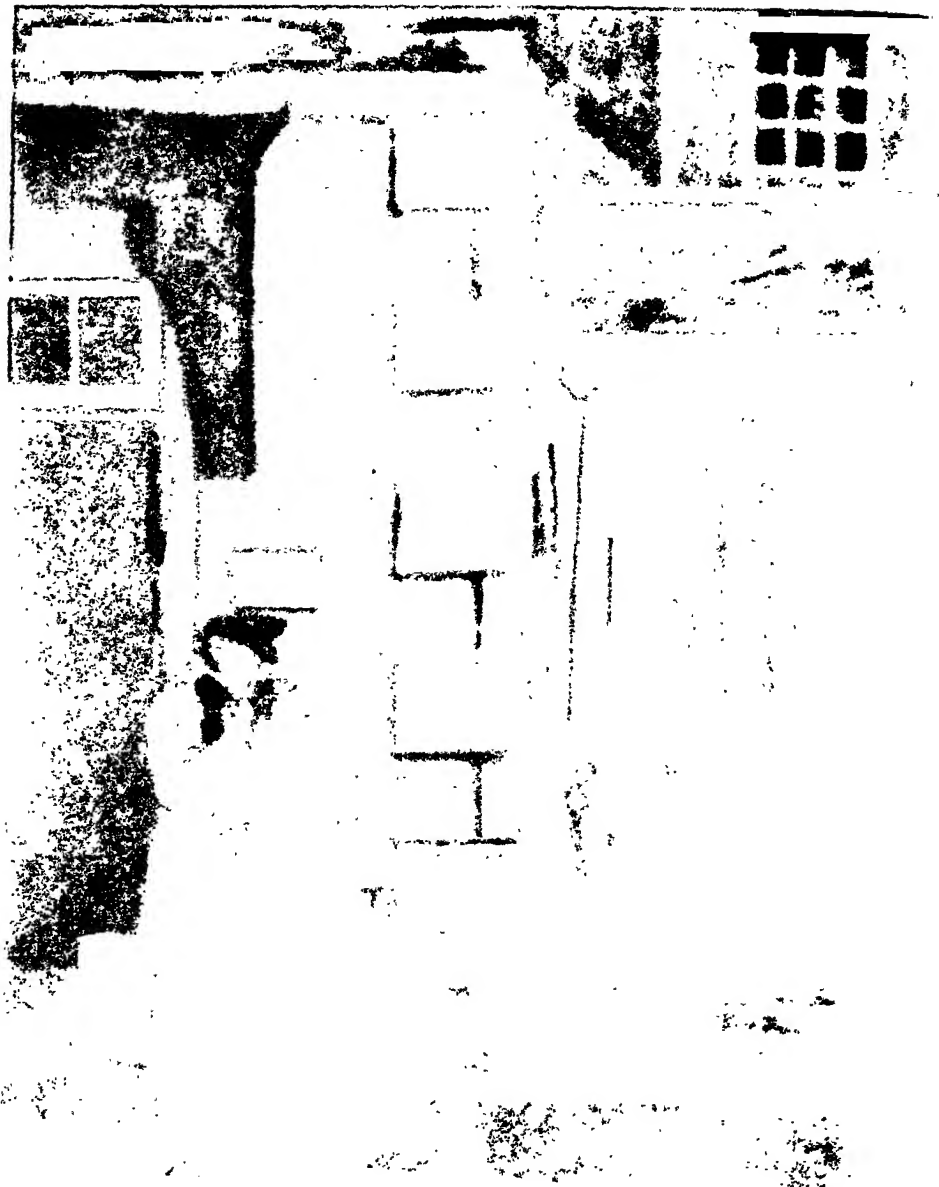
Solyony—L. M. Leonidov



usenbach—V. I. Kachalov



Scene from Act IV

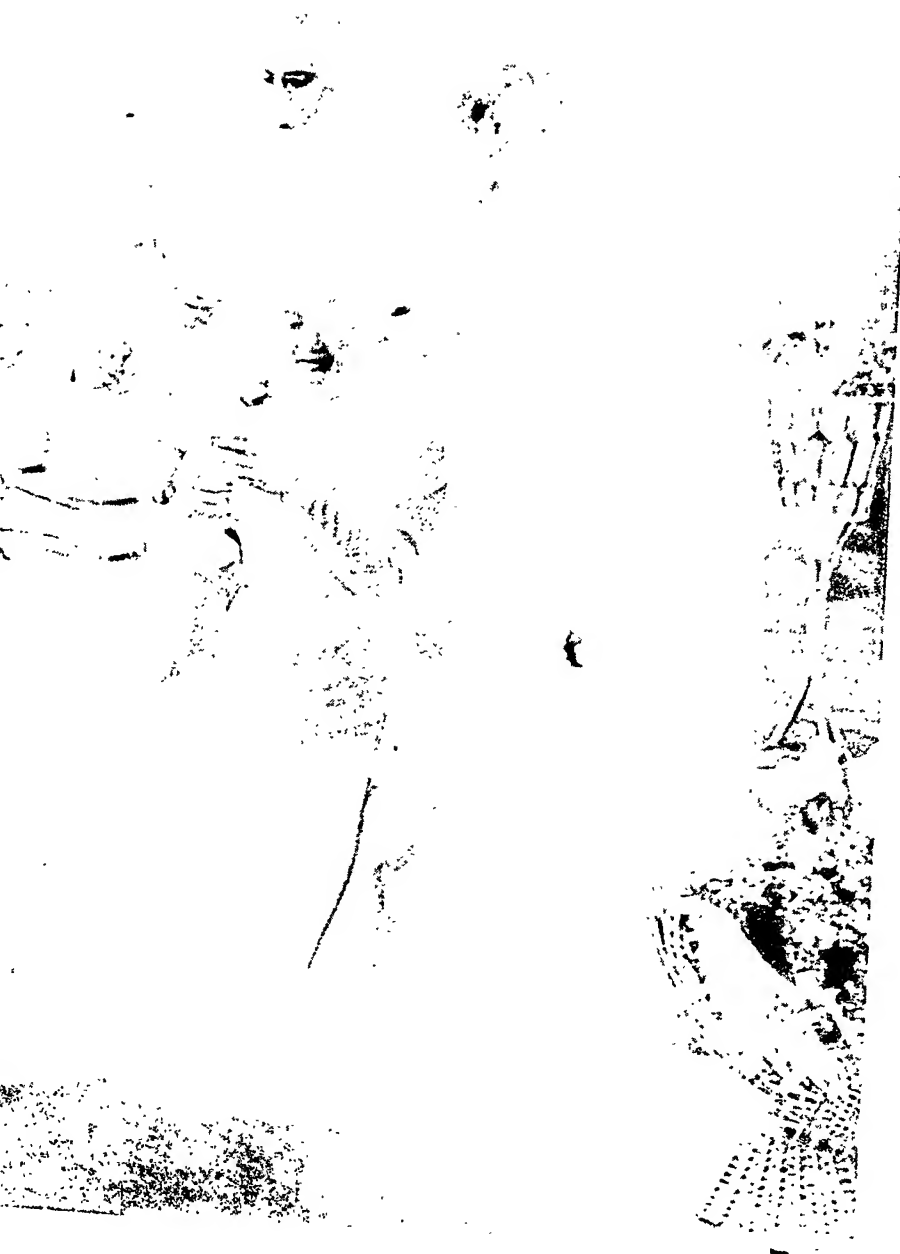




Scene from Act IV (left to right): Vershinin  
—K. S. Stanislavsky, Masha—O. L. Knipper,  
Olga—M. G. Savitskaya, Irina—N. N. Litov-  
tseva



LENINGRAD GOREY THEATRE PRODUCTION OF *THE THREE SISTERS* (1955)  
DIRECTOR: TOVSTONOGOV



Scene from Act I



Tusenbach—S. Y. Yursky, Solyony—  
K. Y. Lavrov



Vershinin—E. Z. Kopelian, Masha—  
T. V. Doronina

Scene from Act III



Solyony—K. Y. Lavrov, Irina—E. A. Popova,  
Chebutykin—N. N. Trofimov



Olga—Z. M. Sharko, Masha—T. V. Doronina,  
Irina—E. A. Popova



Scene from Act IV

Kostya comes in and sits on a low stool at Sorin's feet. All the while Masha does not take her eyes off him

DORN. We're stopping Kostya from working.

KOSTYA. Oh no, it doesn't matter.

Pause

MEDVEDENKO. Begging your pardon, Doctor, but which town abroad did you like best?

DORN. Genoa.

KOSTYA. Why Genoa?

DORN. The street crowds there are marvellous. When you go out of your hotel in the evening the whole street is thronged with people. You drift along aimlessly with the crowd, backwards and forwards, to and fro. You live with it, you become part of it psychologically, and you begin to believe that there actually might be a World Soul, like the one Nina Zarechnaya once acted in your play. By the way, where is she now? And how is she getting on?

KOSTYA. Alright, I suppose.

DORN. I was told that she has been leading a rather strange life. What's it all about?

KOSTYA. It's a long story, Doctor.

DORN. Well, keep it short. (*Pause.*)

KOSTYA. She left home and had an affair with Trigorin. I expect you knew that.

DORN. Yes.

KOSTYA. She had a child and it died. Trigorin lost interest in her and returned to his previous attachments, as one might have expected. As a matter of fact, he had never given them up. Being so spineless, he managed to keep them all going at the same time. As far as I can judge, Nina's private life has been a complete disaster.

DORN. And what about the stage?

KOSTYA. That was worse still. She started in a summer theatre outside Moscow, then went to the provinces. At that time I never let her out of my sight. Wherever she went, I followed. She always took on big parts, but she acted crudely and tastelessly, with a forced voice and awkward gestures. There were moments when



she showed talent—in uttering a cry or dying on the stage—but they were only isolated moments.

DORN. So she has some talent, after all?

KOSTYA. It's hard to tell. I think so. I saw her, but she refused to see me, and they would not let me into her room at the hotel. I understood how she felt and didn't insist on a meeting. (*Pause.*) What else is there to tell you? When I returned home she began writing to me. Her letters were intelligent, warm and interesting. She didn't complain, but I realised that she was deeply unhappy. Every line was like a tense, aching nerve. And her mind seemed to be somewhat disturbed. She signed herself "the Seagull". You know how the miller in *The Water Nymph* keeps saying he's a raven. Well, she kept repeating in her letters that she was a seagull. She's here now.

DORN. Here now! What do you mean?

KOSTYA. At a hotel in the town. She's been there for five days now. I was going to visit her, and Masha here went to see her, but she won't receive anyone. Medvedenko says he saw her in the fields about a mile away yesterday afternoon.

MEDVEDENKO. Yes, I did. She was walking in the opposite direction, towards the town. I greeted her and asked why she hadn't come to see us. She said she would.

KOSTYA. She won't. (*Pause.*) Her father and step-mother won't have anything to do with her. They have put out watchmen to make sure she doesn't get anywhere near the house. (*Walks off with the doctor to the writing desk.*) How easy it is to be a philosopher on paper, Doctor, and how difficult in real life!

SORIN. She was a most charming girl.

DORN. What was that?

SORIN. I said, she was a most charming girl. Regular State Councillor Sorin was even a little enamoured of her for a time.

DORN. The old philanderer.

Shamrayev is heard laughing off-stage

POLINA. I think they've arrived from the station.

KOSTYA. Yes, I can hear Mother.

Enter Arkadina and Trigorin, followed by Shamrayev

SHAMRAYEV (*coming in*). We're all getting older and more decrepit, but you, dear lady, are as young as ever. . . . A bright, frilly blouse, vivacious . . . graceful. . .

ARKADINA. You want to bring me bad luck, you awful man.

TRIGORIN (*to Sorin*). Hello, sir. What's this about you being in bad health? That won't do, you know. (*Seeing Masha, jovially*). Masha!

MASHA. So you recognised me? (*Shakes hands with him.*)

TRIGORIN. Are you married?

MASHA. Yes. Have been for some time now.

TRIGORIN. Happy? (*Bows to Dorn and Medvedenko, who bow in return, then goes up to Kostya hesitantly.*) Your mother tells me that you have forgotten the past and stopped being angry with me.

Kostya holds out his hand

ARKADINA (*to her son*). Look, Boris has brought the magazine with your new story.

KOSTYA (*taking it, to Trigorin*). Thank you. You're most kind. (*All sit down.*)

TRIGORIN. Your admirers want to be remembered to you. They're very interested in you in Petersburg and Moscow. I'm always being asked about you. What you're like, how old you are, whether you're dark or fair. For some reason they all seem to think that you're not a young man. And no one knows your real name, because you use a pseudonym all the time. You're as mysterious as the Man in the Iron Mask.

KOSTYA. Will you be staying here long?

TRIGORIN. No, I'm thinking of leaving for Moscow tomorrow. Can't help it. Got a novel to finish and I've promised to write something for an anthology of short stories. The old, old story as you can see.

While they are talking Arkadina and Polina move a card table to the middle of the room and open it. Shamrayev lights the candles and puts the chairs round. A game of lotto is brought out of the cupboard

TRIGORIN. The weather's not been very kind to me. There's a bitter wind. If it's dropped by the morning I'll go and do a spot of fishing in the lake. Incidentally I must take a look round the garden and that spot where your play was acted—remember? I've got a subject for a new story, but I must check up on the scene of the action first.

MASHA (*to her father*). Let Semyon have a horse, father. He must get home.

SHAMRAYEV (*imitating her*). A horse ... must get home. ... (*Sternly*.) They've just come back from the station. You saw them yourself. How can I send them out again so quickly?

MASHA. But you have other horses. (*When her father does not reply, she waves her hand in irritation*.) Oh, what's the use!

MEDVEDENKO. I'll walk, Masha. Really.

POLINA (*sighing*). Walk, in this weather! (*Sits down at the card table*.) Come along, ladies and gentlemen.

MEDVEDENKO. It's only four miles, after all. Good-bye. (*Kisses his wife's hand*.) Good-bye, mother. (*His mother-in-law holds out her hand reluctantly for him to kiss*.) I wouldn't have bothered anyone, but it's the baby. (*Bows to the assembled company*.) Good-bye. (*Goes out with a guilty air*.)

SHAMRAYEV. He'll get there alright. He's not a general, after all.

POLINA (*knocking on the table*). Come along, ladies and gentlemen. Let's not waste time. They'll be calling us for dinner soon.

Shamrayev, Masha and Dorn sit down at the table

ARKADINA (*to Trigorin*). They always play lotto here in long autumn evenings. It's a very old set, see? My mother used to play with us when we were children. Do have a game before dinner. (*Sits down at the table with Trigorin*.) It's a dull game, but not too bad once you're used to it. (*Deals everyone three cards*.)

KOSTYA (*looking through the magazine*). He's read his story, but he hasn't even cut the pages of mine. (*Puts the magazine down on the desk and then walks to the*

door left; as he passes his mother, he kisses her on the head.)

ARKADINA. Won't you play, Kostya?

KOSTYA. Sorry, I just don't feel like it. I'll take a stroll. (*Goes off.*)

ARKADINA. The stake is ten kopecks. Put it down for me, will you, Doctor?

DORN. Of course, Madam.

MASHA. Has everyone put down their stakes? I'm beginning. Twenty-two.

ARKADINA. Got it.

MASHA. Three!

DORN. There we are.

MASHA. Have you put three down? Eight! Eighty-one! Ten!

SHAMRAYEV. Don't go so quickly.

ARKADINA. What a reception I got in Kharkov. Goodness me. My head's still swimming from it.

MASHA. Thirty-four!

A sad waltz is heard off-stage

ARKADINA. The students gave me a standing ovation. Three baskets of flowers, two wreaths and this. . . . (*Takes off a brooch and throws it on the table.*)

SHAMRAYEV. Very nice, I'm sure.

MASHA. Fifty!

DORN. Fifty, was that?

ARKADINA. I was wearing the most divine outfit. Say what you like, but I do know a thing or two about how to dress.

POLINA. That's Kostya playing. The poor boy's so unhappy.

SHAMRAYEV. He's been slated a lot in the newspapers.

MASHA. Seventy-seven!

ARKADINA. He shouldn't take any notice of that.

TRIGORIN. He's unlucky. He just can't manage to find his right style. His writing's strange, vague, sometimes even like the ravings of a madman. None of his characters are alive.

MASHA. Eleven!

ARKADINA (*glancing round at Sorin*). Are you bored, Pyotr dear? (*Pause.*) He's asleep.

DORN. Regular State Councillor Sorin is asleep.

MASHA. Seven! Ninety!

TRIGORIN. If I lived in a country-house like this, by a lake, do you think I'd write? Not likely. I'd conquer the urge and do nothing but fish all day.

MASHA. Twenty-eight!

TRIGORIN. Catching a perch or a ruff—that's my idea of heaven.

DORN. Well, I believe in Kostya. He's got something. He thinks in images. His stories are vivid and intense. They move me very strongly. But it's a pity that he hasn't any definite aim. He produces an impression and that's all. But an impression is not enough. Are you glad that your son is a writer, Irina?

ARKADINA. Do you know, I haven't actually read anything of his yet. There's never any time.

MASHA. Twenty-six.

Kostya enters quietly and walks over to his desk

SHAMRAYEV (*to Trigorin*). By the way, Mr Trigorin, we've still got something of yours.

TRIGORIN. Oh? What's that?

SHAMRAYEV. Kostya once shot a seagull and you asked me to have it stuffed.

TRIGORIN. Did I? (*Thinks.*) I don't remember.

MASHA. Sixty-six! One!

KOSTYA (*flings open the window and listens*). How dark it is! I can't understand why I am feeling so restless.

ARKADINA. Close the window, Kostya. There's a draught.

Kostya closes the window

MASHA. Eighty-eight!

TRIGORIN. My game, ladies and gentlemen!

ARKADINA (*gaily*). Bravo! Bravo!

SHAMRAYEV. Bravo!

ARKADINA. What extraordinary luck the man has. (*Gets up.*) Let's go and have something to eat now. Our great man didn't have any lunch today. We'll play again

after dinner. (*To her son.*) Leave your writing and come to dinner, Kostya.

KOSTYA. I don't feel like it, mother. I'm not hungry.

ARKADINA. As you like. (*Wakes Sorin.*) Dinner, Pyotr, dear. (*Takes Shamrayev's arm.*) I'll tell you about the reception I got in Kharkov.

Polina puts out the candles on the table, then she and Dorn wheel away the bath-chair. Everyone goes out through the door left. Kostya remains alone on the stage, sitting at his desk

KOSTYA (*preparing to write, reads over what he has just written*). I've talked so much about new forms, but now I feel myself gradually slipping into the old rut. (*Reads*): "The notice on the wall announced" . . . "A pale face, framed with dark hair" . . . Announced, framed. . . . It's just not good enough. (*Crosses it out.*) I'll begin with the hero being woken by the storm, and the rest will have to go. The description of the moonlit evening is too long and stilted. Trigorin has developed his own tricks. It comes easily to him. The neck of a broken bottle gleaming on the mill dam, the black shadow of the water wheel—and there's your moonlit night. But I have to go on about quivering light, and the gently twinkling stars, and the distant notes of a piano dying away in the quiet, fragrant air. It's excruciating! (*Pause.*) I'm becoming more and more convinced that what matters is not new or old forms, but that a person should write without thinking about forms at all, write straight from the heart. (*There is a knock at the window by the desk.*) What was that? (*Looks out of the window.*) Can't see a thing. . . . (*Unlocks the French window and looks into the garden.*) Someone just ran down the steps. (*Calls out.*) Who's there? (*Goes out. He can be heard pacing quickly up and down the terrace. Comes back in a minute with Nina Zarechnaya.*) Nina! Nina!

Nina puts her head on his chest and begins to weep softly

KOSTYA (*moved*). Nina! Nina! It's you! I had a feeling you'd come. I've been so terribly restless all day. (*Takes off her hat and cape.*) My angel, my sweet darling. She's come. Don't let's cry.

NINA. There's someone else here.

KOSTYA. No, there isn't.

NINA. Lock the doors, or someone may come in.

KOSTYA. No, they won't.

NINA. I know Irina Arkadina is here. Lock the doors....

KOSTYA (*locks the door on the right and goes up to the one on the left*). This one doesn't lock. I'll put a chair in front of it. (*Puts an armchair against the door.*) Don't be afraid. No one will come in.

NINA (*staring intently at his face*). Let me look at you. (*Gazing round the room.*) How warm and nice it is. This used to be a drawing-room. Have I changed a lot?

KOSTYA. Yes. You're thinner. And your eyes are larger. Nina, it's so strange to be looking at you. Why did you refuse to see me then? Why didn't you come before? I know you've been living here for almost a week now. I went to your hotel several times each day and stood under your window like a beggar.

NINA. I was afraid you might hate me. Each night I dream that you look at me and don't recognise me. If you only knew. Ever since I arrived I've been walking around here, by the lake. I passed the house several times, but didn't dare come in. Let's sit down. (*They sit down.*) Let's sit down and have a long, long talk. It's so nice here, so warm and cosy. Can you hear the wind? There's a passage in Turgenev that says "Happy is he who has a roof over his head on a night like this, a warm corner of his own". I'm the seagull. No, that's wrong. (*Rubs her forehead.*) What was I saying? Oh, yes. Turgenev. "And may the good Lord help all homeless wanderers." Never mind. (*Sobs.*)

KOSTYA. Nina, you're crying again. Nina!

NINA. Don't worry. It makes me feel better. I haven't cried for two years. Late yesterday evening I came to see whether our stage was still there in the garden. It's still standing. I cried for the first time in two years and felt much easier in my mind, much better. See, I'm not crying anymore. (*Takes his hand.*) So you've become a writer. You're a writer and I'm an actress. We've both got caught up in it now. I used to be so happy, like a

child. I'd wake up in the morning and burst into song. I loved you and I dreamed of fame, but now? I'm leaving for Yelets early in the morning—third-class with the peasants. And in Yelets merchants who like a bit of culture will pester me with their attentions. How sordid life is!

KOSTYA. Why are you going to Yelets?

NINA. I've got an engagement there for the winter. It's time I left.

KOSTYA. Oh, Nina. I cursed you, hated you, tore up your letters and photographs. But all the time I knew that I was yours for ever. I can't stop loving you, Nina. Ever since I lost you and my stories began to be published life has become intolerable. I suffer agonies. It's as though my youth has suddenly been wrenched away. I feel like an old man of ninety. I call your name, I kiss the ground you trod. Wherever I look I see your face, the sweet smile that brought light into the best years of my life.

NINA (*bewildered*). Why does he talk like this? Why does he talk like this?

KOSTYA. I'm quite alone, without the warmth of anyone's affection. I'm as cold as if I were in a dungeon, and whatever I write is dry, harsh and gloomy. Stay here, Nina. I implore you. Or let me come away with you.

Nina quickly puts on her hat and cape

KOSTYA. Nina, why? For God's sake, Nina. (*Watches as she puts her things on; pause.*)

NINA. I've got a cab waiting at the gate. Don't see me out. I'll find my own way. (*Bursts into tears.*) Could I have some water, please?

KOSTYA (*gives her some water*). Where are you going now?

NINA. To the town. (*Pause.*) Is your mother here?

KOSTYA. Yes. Uncle was taken ill on Thursday and we sent her a telegram to come.

NINA. Why do you say that you kiss the ground I trod? I ought to be killed. (*Leans over the table.*) I'm so tired. If only I could rest . . . rest. I'm the seagull. No, that's wrong. I'm an actress. Yes, that's right. (*Hearing*



*Arkadina and Trigorin laughing, she listens for a minute, then runs to the door on the left and looks through the keyhole).* He's here, too. (*Returning to Kostya.*) Yes, that's right. Never mind. He didn't believe in the theatre. He was always laughing at my dreams and little by little I stopped believing in them as well and lost heart. And there were all the worries of being in love, jealousy, constant anxiety for the baby. I became petty and common. I acted badly. I didn't know what to do with my hands, how to stand on the stage or how to control my voice. You can't imagine what it feels like to know you are acting badly. I'm the seagull. No, that's wrong. Do you remember killing a seagull? A man happens to come along, sees her and destroys her, just for the fun of it. An idea for a short story. No, that's wrong. (*Rubs her forehead.*) What was I talking about? The stage. I'm different now. I'm a real actress. I enjoy acting. I revel in it. The stage intoxicates me and I feel I am splendid. But while I've been living here I've been going for walks, walking and thinking, thinking and feeling myself grow stronger in spirit every day. Now I know, Kostya, I realise that what matters in our profession, whether we act on the stage or write, is not fame, not glory, not the things I used to dream about, but the capacity to endure. To bear your cross and have faith. I do have faith and it's not so painful now, and when I think about my calling I'm no longer afraid of life.

KOSTYA (*sadly*). You have found your path. You know where you are going. But I'm still threshing about in a chaos of dreams and images, not knowing who needs it or why. I have no faith and do not know what my calling is.

NINA (*listening intently*). Shush. I'm going now. Good-bye. When I become a great actress, come and watch me. Promise? But now. . . . (*She presses his hand.*) It's late. I can hardly stand up. I'm so tired and hungry.

KOSTYA. Do stay. I'll get you some supper.

NINA. No, no. Don't see me out. I'll find the way myself. My cab is close by. So she brought him with her? Well, what does it matter. Don't say anything to Trigorin when you see him. I love him. Love him even more

than before. An idea for a short story. I love him, passionately, desperately. It was so nice before, Kostya! Do you remember? Life was so pure, so warm, so gay and so innocent. Our feelings were like beautiful delicate flowers. Do you remember? (*Recites.*) "Men, lions, eagles and partridges, the antlered deer, geese, spiders, the silent fish inhabiting the deep, the starfish and those creatures which the eye cannot see—in short, all living things, have completed their sad cycle and expired. For many thousands of years the earth has not borne a single living creature, and this poor moon now lights in vain its lantern. The cranes no longer awake with a cry in the meadows, and the cockchafers are not to be heard in the lime groves."

Embraces Kostya impetuously and runs out through the French window

KOSTYA (*after a pause*). Let's hope no one meets her in the garden and tells mother. It would upset her. . . .

For two minutes he tears up his manuscripts in silence, throws them under the table, then unlocks the door on the right and goes out

DORN (*trying to open the door on the left*). That's strange. The door seems to be locked. (*Comes in and puts the armchair back in its place.*) Quite an obstacle race.

Enter Arkadina and Polina, followed by Yakov with some bottles, then Masha, Shamrayev and Trigorin

ARKADINA. Put the red wine and the beer for Mr Trigorin down here, on the table. We'll drink as we play. Let's sit down, everybody.

POLINA (*to Yakov*). You can bring the tea in now as well. (*Lights the candles and sits down at the card table.*)

SHAMRAYEV (*takes Trigorin to the cupboard*). Here's the thing I was telling you about. (*Takes the stuffed seagull out of the cupboard.*) Your order.

TRIGORIN (*looking at the seagull*). I don't remember. (*Thinks for a minute.*) No, I don't remember.

A shot is heard off-stage right. Everyone starts

ARKADINA (*frightened*). What was that?

DORN. Oh, nothing to worry about. I expect something in my medicine chest has gone off. (*Goes off through the door right and comes back thirty seconds later*). Yes, that's what happened. A bottle of ether burst. (*Sings*.) "Again I stand before you, enchanted"....

ARKADINA (*sitting down at the table*). Ough, I was frightened. It reminded me of.... (*Covers her face with her hands*.) Everything went black....

DORN (*leafing through a magazine, to Trigorin*). There was an article in here about two months ago. A letter from America. And I wanted to ask you... (*takes Trigorin by the waist and leads him to the footlights*)... since I'm very interested in this question... (*drops his voice, in a hushed tone*). Take Madam Arkadina away somewhere. Kostya has shot himself....

*Curtain*

1896

# THE THREE SISTERS

*A drama in four acts*

## CHARACTERS

ANDREI PROZOROV

NATASHA, his fiancée, later his wife

OLGA

MASHA } his sisters

IRINA }

FYODOR KULYGIN, a schoolmaster, Masha's husband

COLONEL ALEXANDER VERSHININ, a battery commander

BARON TUSENBACH, a lieutenant

VASSILY SOLYONY, a subaltern

IVAN CHEBUTYKIN, an army doctor

FEDOTIK, a second lieutenant

RODE, a second lieutenant

FERAPONT, the old watchman from the local council

ANFISSA, the Prozorovs' eighty-year-old nanny

The action takes place in a provincial centre

## ACT ONE

The Prozorovs' house. A drawing-room with a colonnade separating it from the large hall in the background. It is noon on a bright, sunny day. The table in the hall is being laid for lunch.

Olga in the dark-blue regulation dress of a schoolmistress is walking about, marking exercise books. Masha in a black dress with a hat on her lap is sitting, reading a book. Irina in a white dress stands day-dreaming

OLGA. It's exactly a year ago today that Father died, the fifth of May—your birthday, Irina. It was snowing then and awfully cold. I thought I'd never live through it, and you were lying in a dead faint. But a year has passed and now we can talk about it quite naturally. You are wearing white again and your face is radiant. (*The clock strikes noon.*) The clock struck then, too. (*Pause.*) I remember the military band and the salute at the cemetery as they carried Father's coffin. He was a

general, in command of a brigade, but not many people came. Still, it was raining hard as well. Raining and snowing.

IRINA. Why talk about it?

Baron Tusenbach, Chebutykin and Solyony appear by the table in the hall behind the colonnade

OLGA. Today it's warm—we can have the windows wide open—but the birch trees aren't in leaf yet. It's eleven years since Father was given a brigade and we all left Moscow. I remember it clearly. At this time of the year, the beginning of May, everything was in bloom in Moscow. It was warm and bathed in sunlight. Eleven years have passed, yet I still remember everything there as if we had left yesterday. Oh, dear! This morning I woke up and saw the light streaming in, the spring, and my heart leapt for joy, and I longed to be back home!

CHEBUTYKIN. Like hell you did!

TUSENBACH. It's all nonsense, of course.

Masha whistles a tune softly, musing over her book

OLGA. Please don't whistle, Masha. How can you! (*Pause.*) It's being at school all day and then teaching in the evenings that gives me these constant headaches and makes me feel like an old woman. And these four years that I have been teaching at the school I really have felt my youth and strength draining out of me, drop by drop. And my one dream growing stronger all the time. . .

IRINA. To go back to Moscow! To sell the house, have done with everything here and go back to Moscow. . . .

OLGA. Yes! To go back to Moscow, as soon as possible.

Chebutykin and Tusenbach laugh

IRINA. Andrei will be a professor. He would never agree to settle here for good. But poor Masha will have to stay.

OLGA. Masha will come and spend the whole summer with us each year.

Masha whistles softly

IRINA. Let's hope everything works out all right. (*Looking out of the window.*) It's lovely weather today. I don't know why but I feel so bright and gay today! This morning I remembered it was my birthday and felt a sudden surge of joy, and thought of the time when I was little and Mother was still alive. And I kept thinking the most wonderful, wonderful things.

OLGA. You are looking radiant today, remarkably lovely. And Masha is lovely, too. Andrei would be quite handsome, but he's put on weight and it doesn't suit him. And I've grown older and much thinner, probably because I get angry with the girls at school. But today I'm free, I'm at home, my head doesn't ache, and I feel younger than I did yesterday. I'm only twenty-eight, after all. . . . Everything is all right, everything is as the good Lord wills, but I do think it would be better if I were married and stayed at home all day. (*Pause.*) I should love my husband.

TUSENBACH (*to Solyony*). What nonsense you talk. I'm sick of listening to you. (*Coming into the drawing-room.*) I forgot to tell you. Our new battery commander, Colonel Vershinin, is coming to visit you today. (*Sits down at the piano.*)

OLGA. Oh, that will be nice.

IRINA. Is he old?

TUSENBACH. Not particularly. Forty to forty-five at the most. (*Plays softly.*) Seems a nice enough fellow. Not stupid—that's for sure. But he does talk rather a lot.

IRINA. Is he an interesting person?

TUSENBACH. Yes, fairly, except that he has a wife, mother-in-law, and two little girls. It's his second wife, what's more. Everywhere he goes he announces that he has a wife and two daughters. He'll say so here as well. His wife's a bit batty. Wears her hair in a long, virginal plait, talks very high-falutin', philosophises a lot, and tries to commit suicide every so often, evidently just to spite her husband. I would have left a woman like that long ago, but he just complains and puts up with it.

SOLYONY (*coming into the drawing-room from the hall with Chebutykin*). I can only lift half a hundred-

weight with one hand, but with two I can lift almost one and a half hundredweight. From which I conclude that two men are not only twice but three times as strong as one, even more. . . .

CHEBUTYKIN (*walking in reading the newspaper*). For thinning hair . . . half an ounce of naphthalene to half a bottle of spirit. Dissolve and apply daily. (*Scribbles in his notebook.*) Right, we'll make a note of that! (*To Solyony.*) Well, as I was saying. The cork fits into the bottle and has a glass tube running through it. Then you take a pinch of ordinary alum. . . .

IRINA. Doctor Chebutykin! Dear Doctor Chebutykin!

CHEBUTYKIN. What is it, my darling girl.

IRINA. Tell me why I'm so happy today. It's as if I were in a sailing boat under a bright blue sky with big white birds above me. Why is it?

CHEBUTYKIN (*kisses both her hands, tenderly*). My little white bird. . . .

IRINA. When I woke up this morning, got out of bed and washed, I suddenly felt as if I understood everything in the world and knew how to live. Dear Doctor Chebutykin, I know absolutely everything. A person must work, work in the sweat of his brow, no matter who he is, and this will give his life meaning, give him happiness, joy, and an aim in life. How fine to be a labourer who gets up at the crack of dawn and breaks stones in the street, or a shepherd, or a schoolmaster who teaches children, or an engine driver on the railway. And it's even better to be an ox or a horse, who do a good day's work than a young woman who gets up at midday, has coffee in bed, then takes two hours to get dressed. How dreadful that is! You know how you thirst for a drink on a hot day? Well, that's how I long to work. And if I don't get up early and do a full day's work, you must stop being my friend, Doctor.

CHEBUTYKIN (*tenderly*). Yes, my dear.

OLGA. Father taught us to get up at seven. Irina wakes up at seven now and lies thinking about something until at least nine. With such a serious expression on her face! (*Laughs.*)

IRINA. You're used to seeing me as a little girl and

you think it strange when I have a serious expression on my face. But I'm twenty years old.

TUSENBACH. That longing to work. How well I understand it! I've never done a stroke of work in my life. I was born in cold, idle St Petersburg, in a family which had never known what work or worry was. I remember coming home from school and kicking out at the footman who was trying to take off my boots. My mother would watch me admiringly and she couldn't understand when other people took a different view of the matter. I was protected from work. But only just! Only just! The time is coming when something huge will overwhelm us. A strong, healthy storm is on its way. It is already quite close and soon it will sweep away the idleness and complacency in our society, the prejudice against work and the stagnant boredom. I shall work, and in another twenty-five or thirty years everyone will work. Everyone.

CHEBUTYKIN. I won't.

TUSENBACH. You don't count.

SOLYONY. In twenty-five years' time you will be no more, thank goodness. Two or three years from now you will die of apoplexy or I'll lose my temper and put a bullet through your skull, my angel. (*Takes a bottle of perfume from his pocket and sprinkles it over his chest and hands.*)

CHEBUTYKIN (*laughs*). I've never done anything, you know. It's true. I haven't raised a finger ever since I left university. Haven't read a single book, only newspapers. (*Takes another newspaper out of his pocket.*) Here you are. I know from the papers that there was someone called Dobrolyubov, say, but I haven't the faintest idea what he wrote. (*Sound of banging on the floor from downstairs.*) Ah. That's for me. I have a visitor. Just coming ... wait a minute. ... (*Hurries off combing his beard.*)

IRINA. He's up to something.

TUSENBACH. Yes. He went off with a very self-important look on his face. He's obviously about to bring you a present.

IRINA. Oh dear. What a nuisance.



OLGA. Yes, it's awful. He's always doing something silly.

MASHA. A green oak by the curving shore, and on that oak a chain of gold. . . . And on that oak a chain of gold. . . . (*Gets up and sings quietly.*)

OLGA. You're not very cheerful today, Masha.

Masha goes on singing and puts on her hat

OLGA. Where are you going?

MASHA. Home.

IRINA. That's strange.

TUSENBACH. Leaving before the party!

MASHA. Never mind. I'll come back in the evening. Good-bye, my sweet. (*Kisses Irina.*) Here's wishing you health and happiness again. In the old days, when Father was still alive, we used to have thirty or forty officers at our birthdays and it was very gay. But today there's hardly a soul and it's as quiet as a desert. I'll be going. I'm rather down in the dumps today, rather miserable, but don't you take any notice of me. (*Laughing through tears.*) We'll have a talk later. Good-bye for now, my dear. I'm going for a walk somewhere.

IRINA (*upset*). Why do you have to. . . .

OLGA (*tearfully*). I understand you, Masha.

SOLYONY. When a man philosophises, you get philosophistics or sophistics. But when it's a woman, or two women, you get—hey, diddle dee dee!

MASHA. What do you mean by that, you awfully terrible man.

SOLYONY. Nothing. He scarce had time to catch his breath, before the bear was hugging him to death! (*Pause.*)

MASHA (*angrily, to Olga*). Don't cry!

Enter Anfissa and Ferapont with a cake

ANFISSA. This way, Grandad. Come on in. Your shoes aren't muddy. (*To Irina.*) It's from the Town Council, a cake from Mr Protopopov.

IRINA. Thank you. Tell him I'm very grateful. (*Takes the cake.*)

FERAPONT. Eh?

IRINA (*more loudly*). Tell him I'm very grateful.

OLGA. Give him a piece of pie, Nanny. Go with her, Ferapont, and she'll give you a piece of pie.

FERAPONT. Eh?

ANFISSA. Come along, Grandad. Come along....  
(*Goes out with Ferapont.*)

MASHA. I don't like that Protopopov. Mikhail Potapich or Ivanich, whatever his name is, he shouldn't have been invited.

IRINA. I haven't invited him.

MASHA. Good for you.

Chebutykin comes in, followed by a soldier with a silver samovar.  
Sounds of surprise and displeasure

OLGA (*covers her face with her hands*). A samovar! How awful! (*Goes into the hall up to the table.*)

IRINA. What were you thinking of, my dear, old Doctor!

TUSENBACH (*laughing*). I told you so.

MASHA. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Doctor.

CHEBUTYKIN. My darling girls. You are all I have. You're all that I hold most dear in this world. I shall soon be sixty. I'm an old man, a lonely, useless old man. There's nothing good about me, except my love for you. But for you I would have been dead and gone years ago. (*To Irina.*) I've known you ever since you were born, dear child. I used to carry you in my arms. I loved your mother.

IRINA. But why such expensive presents?

CHEBUTYKIN (*through tears, crossly*). Expensive presents! Don't talk nonsense! (*To his orderly.*) Take the samovar through there. (*In a mocking voice.*) Expensive presents. (*The orderly takes the samovar into the hall.*)

ANFISSA (*walking across the drawing-room*). There's a stranger to see you, my dears. A Colonel Somebody. He's taken his coat off already and he's a-comin' this way. Be a nice, polite, little girl, Irina, my love. (*Going out.*) It's long past lunch time, and all. Oh, my goodness!

TUSENBACH. That must be Vershinin.

Enter Vershinin

TUSENBACH. Colonel Vershinin.

VERSHININ (*to Masha and Irina.*) Allow me to intro-

duce myself. Colonel Vershinin. It's so nice to see you at last. Well, I never! How grown-up you've become.

IRINA. Do sit down. We're very pleased to see you, too.

VERSHININ (*gaily*). How nice it is to be here. But there were three of you. I remember—three little girls. I can't recall your faces, but I remember perfectly well that your father, Colonel Prozorov, had three little girls. I saw them with my own eyes. How time flies! Oh, how time flies!

TUSENBACH. Colonel Vershinin has just arrived from Moscow.

IRINA. From Moscow? You are from Moscow?

VERSHININ. Yes. Your father was a battery commander there, and I was an officer in the same brigade. (*To Masha.*) I seem to remember your face slightly.

MASHA. I don't remember you at all.

IRINA. Olga! Olga! (*Shouts into the hall.*) Come here, Olga!

Olga comes into the drawing-room from the hall

IRINA. Colonel Vershinin is from Moscow.

VERSHININ. You must be Olga, the eldest. And you're Masha. And you're Irina—the youngest.

OLGA. So you are from Moscow?

VERSHININ. Yes. I did my training in Moscow and then served there for quite a long time, until I was finally given this battery and came out here, as you can see. I don't remember you personally. I just remember that there were three sisters. I haven't forgotten what your father looked like though. If I close my eyes, I can picture him very vividly. I used to visit you in Moscow.

OLGA. I thought I could remember everyone, but. . .

VERSHININ. My first name is Alexander.

IRINA. So you are from Moscow, Colonel Vershinin. What a surprise!

OLGA. We're moving back there, you see.

IRINA. We expect to be there by autumn. It's our home town. We were born there. In Old Bassmannaya Street. (*They both laugh happily.*)

MASHA. It's meeting someone from back home so unexpectedly. (*Animatedly.*) Now I've got it! Remember

how they used to talk about the lovesick Major, Olga? You were a lieutenant then and you were in love with someone. For some reason everyone teased you by calling you 'Major'.

VERSHININ (*laughs*). That's right. The lovesick Major. You're quite right.

MASHA. You only had a moustache then. How you've aged! (*Through tears.*) Oh, how you've aged!

VERSHININ. Yes, I was still young and in love when they called me the lovesick Major. Things are different now.

OLGA. But you haven't a single grey hair. You may have got older, but you're not an old man yet.

VERSHININ. I'm getting on for forty-three, all the same. Have you been away from Moscow long?

IRINA. Eleven years. Why are you crying, Masha, you funny girl. (*Through tears.*) You're making me cry, too.

MASHA. I'm all right. Where did you live?

VERSHININ. In Old Bassmannaya Street.

OLGA. So did we.

VERSHININ. At one time I lived in German Street. I used to walk from there to the Red Barracks. There was a gloomy bridge on the way. You could hear the sound of the water under it, and that made you feel very sad if you were alone. (*Pause.*) But here you have a fine, broad river. A splendid river.

OLGA. Yes, but it's very cold here. Cold and lots of mosquitoes.

VERSHININ. Oh, come now! You've got such a good, healthy, Russian climate here. Forest, river . . . and birch trees. Those sweet, simple birches. I love them more than any other tree. It's a good place to live. But it's strange that the railway station should be twenty miles away. And nobody knows why.

SOLYONY. I know why. (*Everyone looks at him.*) Because if the railway were near, it wouldn't be far away, and if it's far away, that means it's not near.

An embarrassed silence

TUSENBACH. Our friend here is a real wag.

OLGA. Now I remember you, too.

VERSHININ. I used to know your mother.

CHEBUTYKIN. She was a lovely woman, God rest her soul.

IRINA. Mother was buried in Moscow.

OLGA. At the Novo-Devichy Convent.

MASHA. And, would you believe it, I'm beginning to forget her face. In the same way people won't be able to remember us. They'll forget, too.

VERSHININ. Yes, they'll forget. Such is fate, and there's nothing we can do about it. There will come a time when everything we regard as serious and important will be forgotten, or seem quite trivial. (*Pause.*) The funny thing is that we have no way of knowing what people will consider fine and important and what will seem pathetic and ridiculous. After all, the discoveries made by Copernicus, say, or Columbus, seemed very unnecessary and silly at the time, didn't they? While some empty nonsense written by a crackpot was accepted as a great truth. The time may come when our present life, to which we are reconciled, will seem very strange, awkward, stupid, and not particularly moral, perhaps even sinful.

TUSENBACH. Who knows? Perhaps people will consider our life to be uplifting and speak of it with respect. There are no more executions, invasions or torturing, but all the same there is so much suffering.

SOLYONY (*in a thin voice*). Cluck, cluck, cluck. . . . There's nothing the Baron enjoys so much as philosophising.

TUSENBACH. Will you please leave me alone, Solyony. (*Moves to another seat.*) This is getting tiresome.

SOLYONY (*in a thin voice*). Cluck, cluck, cluck. . . .

TUSENBACH (*to Vershinin*). The suffering that can be seen today—and there is much of it—suggests rather that a certain moral uplift has already been achieved by our society.

VERSHININ. Yes, yes, of course.

CHEBUTYKIN. You just said that people would consider our life uplifting, but people themselves are so earth-bound. (*Gets up.*) Just look at me! You have to say my life is uplifting to console me, that's obvious.

Sound of a violin being played off-stage

MASHA. That's Andrei, our brother, playing.

IRINA. He's terribly clever. He'll probably be a professor one day. Father was a military man, but his son has chosen an academic career.

MASHA. Because Father wished it.

OLGA. We teased him a lot today. He seems to be a little in love.

IRINA. With one of the local young ladies. She'll probably come today.

MASHA. Oh, the way she dresses! You couldn't exactly say that her clothes are unattractive or out of fashion, but you just feel sorry for her. She'll put on a ghastly fringed yellow skirt with a bright red blouse. And her cheeks are all scrubbed and shining. Andrei isn't in love with her. I won't allow it. He's got some taste, after all. He's just teasing us, just playing the fool. Yesterday I heard that she was getting married to Protopopov, the chairman of the Local Council. That's as it should be. (*Through the side door.*) Andrei, come here! Just for a minute, dear.

Enter Andrei

OLGA. This is my brother Andrei.

VERSHININ. Alexander Vershinin.

ANDREI. Andrei Prozorov. (*Wipes his perspiring face.*) You are the new battery commander, I suppose.

OLGA. Just think, Andrei. Colonel Vershinin is from Moscow.

ANDREI. Really. That's too bad. My sisters won't give you a moment of peace now.

VERSHININ. I've already managed to bore your sisters.

IRINA. Look what a pretty picture frame Andrei has given me. (*Shows him the frame.*) He made it himself.

VERSHININ (*looking at the frame and not knowing what to say*). Yes . . . very nice.

IRINA. And you see that frame over there, above the piano. He made that too.

Andrei waves his hand and walks away

OLGA. He's so clever, and he plays the violin, and makes little fretwork objects. In fact, he's good at lots

of things. Don't run away, Andrei. He has this habit of always running away. Come here!

Masha and Irina take him by the arms and laughingly lead him back

MASHA. Come on! Come on!

ANDREI. Do leave me alone, please!

MASHA. How funny you are. Colonel Vershinin used to be called the lovesick Major, but it never made him angry.

VERSHININ. Not in the slightest.

MASHA. I want to call you the lovesick violinist.

IRINA. Or the lovesick professor!

OLGA. He's in love! Our Andy's in love.

IRINA (*clapping*). Bravo! Bravo! Encore! Andy's in love!

CHEBUTYKIN (*comes up to Andrei from behind and puts both arms round his waist*). T'is for love alone that nature doth create us! (*Laughs loudly, keeping hold of the newspaper all the time.*)

ANDREI. That's enough! That's enough! (*Wipes his face.*) I didn't sleep a wink last night and I'm not quite myself, as they say. Read till four, then went to bed, but it was no good. I kept thinking about this and that, then all of a sudden it was dawn and the sun was creeping into my bedroom. There's an English book I'd like to translate this summer, while I'm still here.

VERSHININ. Do you know English, then?

ANDREI. Yes, I do. Father, God rest his soul, plagued us with education. It's silly and absurd, but I have to confess that I began to put on weight after his death and I've got quite fat in the past year as if my body had shaken off that plague. Thanks to Father, my sisters and I know French, German and English, and Irina knows Italian as well. But what it cost us!

MASHA. Knowing three languages in this town is a useless luxury. Not even a luxury. It's a useless appendage, like a sixth finger. We know a lot of unnecessary things.

VERSHININ. Oh, how can you say that! (*Laughs.*) You know a lot of unnecessary things! I don't believe any town can be so boring and wretched that it doesn't need

an intelligent, educated person. Say that out of the hundred thousand inhabitants in this town, which is a provincial backwater, of course, there are only three people like you. Obviously you can't expect to triumph over the mass of ignorant people around you. You will gradually have to give way and become absorbed by the one hundred thousand. Life will stifle you. But you won't disappear altogether, nor will you cease to exert an influence. After you another six people like you will appear, say, then twelve and so on, until the people like you are the majority. In two or three hundred years life on earth will be more splendid and marvellous than we can imagine. Man has need of such a life and if it does not exist as yet he should try to foresee it, wait for it, dream about it and prepare for it. To do so he must see and know more than his father and grandfather. (*Laughs.*) And you are complaining that you know a lot of unnecessary things.

MASHA (*takes off her hat*). I'm staying for lunch.

IRINA (*sighing*). We should have written all that down, really. . . .

In the meantime Andrei has slipped out unnoticed

TUSENBACH. You say that life on earth will be splendid and marvellous many years from now. That is true. But in order to take part in it now, even at a distance, we must prepare for it, we must work. . . .

VERSHININ (*stands up*). Quite so. What a lot of flowers there are here! (*Looking round.*) And what a wonderful place this is. How I envy you! All my life I've lived in lodgings with two chairs, a sofa and stoves that fill the room with smoke. What I've always missed in life is flowers like these. (*Wipes his hands.*) Ah, well!

TUSENBACH. Yes, we must work. You are probably thinking that the German in me has gone all sentimental. But I'm Russian, honestly I am. I don't even speak German. My father is Orthodox. (*Pause.*)

VERSHININ (*pacing up and down*). I often wonder what would happen if we could start our lives again, knowing what we know now. If the first life, which has already been lived, were just the rough draft and the second one the fair copy. I think that each of us would try



most of all not to repeat his mistakes. Or at least he would create different circumstances for his life, get himself a place like this with masses of flowers and sunlight. I have a wife and two little girls, my wife's a sick woman, and so on and so forth. If I could start my life again I would never get married. No, certainly not.

Enter Kulygin in a schoolmaster's frock-coat

KULYGIN (*goes up to Irina*). Allow me, dear sister, to congratulate you on your birthday and to wish you sincerely, with all my heart, good health and everything that one can wish a young lady of your age. And then to make you a present of this little book. (*Hands her a book.*) The history of our school over the last fifty years, written by myself. It's a simple little book, written for want of anything better to do, but you be sure to read it all the same. Good morning, everyone! (*To Uershinin.*) Fyodor Kulygin, teacher at the local grammar school. (*To Irina.*) This book contains a list of all the pupils who have graduated from our school over the last fifty years. *Feci quod potui, faciant meliora potentes*<sup>5</sup>. (*Kisses Masha.*)

IRINA. But you gave me the same book at Easter.

KULYGIN (*laughs*). Surely not! In that case give it back to me or, better still, let the Colonel have it. Here, Colonel. Read it when you've got a spare moment.

VERSHININ. Thank you. (*Prepares to leave.*) Delighted to have met you. . . .

OLGA. You're not going? Oh, you mustn't!

IRINA. Do stay and have lunch with us.

OLGA. Please do!

VERSHININ (*bows*). I have appeared at your birthday party uninvited. Do excuse me. I didn't know. I haven't even congratulated you. (*Goes into the hall with Olga.*)

KULYGIN. Today is Sunday, ladies and gentlemen, the day of rest. So let us rest and enjoy ourselves each in accordance with his age and station. We must remember to roll up the carpets and store them away until winter. They should be sprinkled with insect-powder or naphthalene. The Romans were healthy because they knew how to

<sup>5</sup> I have done my best, let he who can do better.

labour and how to rest from their labours. They had *mens sana in corpore sano*. Their life followed a set form. Our headmaster always says that the most important thing in any life is its form. Anything that loses its form will perish—the same goes for our everyday life. (*Puts his arm round Masha's waist, laughing.*) Masha loves me. My wife loves me. And you must put the curtains away, too. I'm in excellent spirits today. Masha, we're due at the headmaster's at four this afternoon. An outing is being arranged for the staff and their families.

MASHA. I'm not going.

KULYGIN (*pained*). Why not, Masha, my dear.

MASHA. We'll talk about that later. (*Angrily.*) Oh, alright, I'll go. Only do leave me alone, please. (*Walks away.*)

KULYGIN. And afterwards we'll spend the evening at the headmaster's. There's a man who, in spite of his poor health, does his utmost to be sociable. A man of irreproachable character. A most excellent man. After the meeting yesterday he said to me: "I'm tired, Kulygin, tired!" (*Looks at the clock on the wall, then at his watch.*) Yes, "I'm tired," he said.

Sound of a violin off-stage

OLGA. Lunch is ready, ladies and gentlemen. Take your seats, please. We have a pie.

KULYGIN. Ah, my dear Olga! Yesterday I worked from early morning until eleven o'clock at night. I was so tired. And today I feel happy. (*Goes into the hall and up to the table.*) My dear Olga. . . .

CHEBUTYKIN (*puts the newspaper into his pocket and combs his beard*). A pie! That's splendid.

MASHA (*sternly, to Chebutykin*). Make sure you don't drink anything today. Do you hear me? Drinking's bad for you.

CHEBUTYKIN. Oh, why bring that up? I've got over that now. It's two years since I last got drunk. (*Impatiently.*) And what does it matter in any case?

MASHA. Don't you dare drink anything, all the same. (*Angrily, but trying not to be overheard by her husband.*) Another boring evening at the headmaster's, damn it!

TUSENBACH. If I were you, I wouldn't go. It's very simple.

CHEBUTYKIN. Don't go, my love.

MASHA. Don't go, indeed. What a wretched, intolerable life this is. (*Goes into the hall.*)

CHEBUTYKIN (*follows her*). Come now!

SOLYONY (*walking over to the hall*). Cluck, cluck, cluck. . . .

TUSENBACH. That's enough, Solyony. Stop it.

SOLYONY. Cluck, cluck, cluck. . . .

KULYGIN (*cheerfully*). Your good health, Colonel! I'm a teacher and one of the family here, Masha's husband. She's a good person. Masha. A very good person.

VERSHININ. I'll have some of that dark vodka, please. (*Drinks.*) Your good health! (*To Olga.*) It's so nice here.

Only Irina and Tusenbach remain in the drawing-room

IRINA. Masha is in a bad mood today. She got married at eighteen when she thought he was the cleverest person in the world. It's different now. He's the kindest, but not the cleverest.

OLGA (*impatiently*). Andrei, do come along!

ANDREI (*off-stage*). Just coming. (*Comes in and goes up to the table.*)

TUSENBACH. What are you thinking?

IRINA. Nothing in particular. I don't like that Solyony of yours. He frightens me. Talks nothing but nonsense. . . .

TUSENBACH. He's a strange fellow. I alternate between feeling sorry for him and irritated by him, but mainly sorry. I think he's shy. When he and I are alone he can be very intelligent and affectionate, but in company he's bad-mannered and bullying. Don't go in yet. Let them get seated at the table. And let me spend a little longer with you. What are you thinking? (*Pause.*) You're twenty and I'm not thirty yet. Think of all the years we have ahead of us. A long, long string of days full of my love for you.

IRINA. Please don't talk to me of love.

TUSENBACH (*not listening*). I yearn so passionately to live, to strive, to work, and this yearning has become merged with my love for you, Irina. As luck would have

it, you are beautiful, so life also seems beautiful to me! What are you thinking?

IRINA. You say life is beautiful. But what if it only appears to be. For the three of us, my sisters and I, life has not been beautiful yet. It has choked us like a lot of weeds. I've started to cry. I mustn't. (*Quickly wipes her face and smiles.*) We must work. It's because we've never worked that we're so miserable and take such a gloomy view of life. We are the children of people who despised work.

Natasha comes in; she is wearing a pink dress and a green belt

NATASHA. They're already sitting down to lunch. I'm late. (*Takes a quick look at herself in the mirror, pats her hair and smooths her dress.*) My hair's not looking too bad. (*Catches sight of Irina.*) Happy birthday, Miss Irina. (*Gives her a long, smacking kiss.*) You've got so many guests. I feel quite out of it. Good day, Baron.

OLGA (*coming into the drawing room*). And here's Natasha. Hello, my dear! (*They kiss.*)

NATASHA. You've got such a lot of people here. I feel terribly shy.

OLGA. Don't be silly. They're all old friends. (*In a low, worried voice.*) You're wearing a green belt! You mustn't do that, dear!

NATASHA. Why, is it unlucky?

OLGA. No. It just doesn't suit your dress. It looks funny.

NATASHA (*in a whining voice*). Does it really? But it's not green really, it's more like brown. (*Follows Olga into the hall.*)

Everyone sits down to lunch in the hall; the drawing-room is empty

KULYGIN. Here's wishing you a good husband, Irina. It's time you got married.

CHEBUTYKIN. And the same to you, Natasha!

KULYGIN. Natasha already has a young man.

MASHA (*strikes her plate with her fork*). Give us a glass of wine then, lads. This is the life! Here goes!

KULYGIN. Three minus for behaviour.

VERSHININ. This liqueur is delicious. What's the flavour?

SOLYONY. Cockroaches.

IRINA (*in a weepy voice*). Ugh! How revolting.

OLGA. There is fried turkey and apple pie for dinner. Thank goodness! I've got the whole day at home, and the evening as well. Everybody come back this evening.

VERSHININ. May I come too?

IRINA. Please do.

NATASHA. Everything's very informal here.

CHEBUTYKIN. Tis for love alone that nature doth create us! (*Laughs.*)

ANDREI (*angrily*). Stop it, everybody. It's so boring.

Enter Fedotik and Rodé with a large basket of flowers

FEDOTIK. They're having lunch already.

RODÉ (*loudly and gutterally*). Lunch already? So they are.

FEDOTIK. Just a minute! (*Takes a photograph.*) One! Wait a bit more! (*Takes another photograph.*) Two! Now I'm ready!

They pick up the basket and go into the hall, where they are given a noisy welcome

RODÉ (*loudly*). A happy birthday and all the very best. The weather's wonderful today, absolutely marvellous. All morning I was out walking with the schoolboys. I teach gym up at the grammar school.

FEDOTIK. You can move now, Miss Irina. (*Takes a photograph.*) You're looking very nice today. (*Takes a top out of his pocket.*) By the way, here's a top for you. It makes a lovely noise.

IRINA. What fun!

MASHA. A green oak by the curving shore, and on that oak a chain of gold. . . . And on that oak a chain of gold. . . . (*Tearfully.*) Why do I keep saying that? I've had it on my mind all day.

KULYGIN. We're thirteen at table!

RODÉ (*loudly*). Surely no one here is superstitious, ladies and gentlemen? (*Laughter.*)

KULYGIN. Thirteen at table means that somebody.

here is in love. It wouldn't be you, Doctor, by any chance, would it? (*Laughter.*)

CHEBUTYKIN. I'm an old sinner, but Miss Natasha seems to be embarrassed about something or other. Darned if I know what.

Loud laughter; Natasha runs out of the hall into the drawing-room, followed by Andrei

ANDREI. Don't take any notice of them. Wait! Stop, I beg you.

NATASHA. I'm so ashamed of myself. I don't know what's the matter with me, and they keep laughing at me. Running out of the hall just now like that was bad manners, I know, but I couldn't help it. I couldn't. . . . (*Covers her face with her hands.*)

ANDREI. I beg you, I beseech you, don't be upset, my dear. They're only joking. They don't mean any harm. Really. They're all good, kind people who love me and you, my dearest, my sweetest. Come here to the window. They can't see us here. (*Looks round.*)

NATASHA. I'm not used to being in company.

ANDREI. Oh, youth! Wonderful, marvellous youth! My dearest, my sweetest, don't be so upset! Believe me, please! I feel so wonderful. My heart is full of love and ecstasy. No one can see us. No one. Why, when did I fall in love with you—I don't understand any of it. My dear, lovely, innocent Natasha. Please be my wife! I love you, love you . . . as I've never loved anyone before. (*A kiss.*)

Two officers come in and stop in amazement at the sight of the kissing couple

*Curtain*

## ACT TWO

The scene is the same as in Act One.  
It is eight o'clock in the evening. The faint sound of an accordion can be heard from the street. The house is in darkness. Enter Natasha in a dressing gown with a lighted candle. She stops at the door of Andrei's room

NATASHA. What are you doing, Andy, dear? Reading? It's nothing, I just wondered. (*Walks on, opens another door, takes a look inside, then closes it again.*) Any lights left burning...?

ANDREI (*comes in carrying a book*). What's the matter, Natasha?

NATASHA. I'm just making sure no lights have been left burning. It's Shrovetide and the servants are in a fair tizzy. Have to keep an eye on things, or goodness knows what might happen. Last night I went into the drawing room at twelve o'clock and found a lighted candle there. I still don't know who left it. (*Puts down her candle.*) What's the time?

ANDREI (*looking at his watch*). A quarter past eight.

NATASHA. And Olga and Irina aren't home yet. They still haven't got back. Working their fingers to the bone, poor things. Olga's at a staff meeting and Irina at the telegraph office. (*Sighs.*) Only this morning I said to your sister: "Irina," I said, "you must look after yourself, my love." But she won't listen to me. Quarter past eight, did you say? I'm afraid our Bobbikins is ill. Why is he so cold? Yesterday he had a temperature, but now he's as cold as ice. I'm so frightened.

ANDREI. Don't worry, Natasha. He's a healthy baby.

NATASHA. Still I'd better put him on a diet. I'm so frightened. They say the mummies are due here at nine o'clock. It would be better if they didn't come, Andy, dear.

ANDREI. Well, I don't know. They have been invited.

NATASHA. This morning the little lad woke up and gave me a great big smile. He recognised me, you see! "Hello Bobbikins," I said, "Hello, my darling!" And he laughed! Children understand everything, you know. So I'll tell them not to let the mummies in, Andy, shall I?

ANDREI (*hesitantly*). Well, it's really up to my sisters. It's their house.

NATASHA. Yes, it's their house as well. I'll tell them. They're so kind. (*Starts walking off.*) I've ordered yoghurt for supper. The doctor says you must eat nothing but yoghurt if you want to lose weight. (*Stops.*) Bobbikins is so cold. I'm afraid that room is too draughty for him.

МОСКОВСКИЙ  
ХУДОЖЕСТВЕННЫЙ  
ТЕАТРЪ

N 1315



**Суббота, 17-го Января.**

**Въ 1-й разъ:**

# ВИШНЕВЫЙ САДЪ,

пыса въ 4-хъ дѣяствіяхъ, соч. А. П. Чехова.

Участвующие: г-жи О. Л. Книпперъ, К. С. Станиславскія, М. П. Лилина, М. Ө. Андреева, В. И. Качаловъ, Л. М. Леонидовъ, В. Ө. Грибунинъ, Е. П. Муратова, А. Р. Артёмъ, Н. М. Москвинъ, С. В. Халютина, Н. Г. Александровъ, М. А. Громовъ, А. Л. Загаровъ, Е. Е. Рудаковъ и др.

Декорації художника **В. А. Симова.**

**БИЛЕТЫ ВСѢ ПРОДАНЫ.**

**НАЧАЛО ВЪ 8 ЧАС. ВЕЧЕРА, ОКОНЧАНИЕ ВЪ 12 ЧАС. НОЧН.**

Воскресенье, 18-го Января, въ 56-й разъ: „Юлій Цезарь.“

Понедельник, 19-го Января, во 2-й раз: „Вишневый сад“.  
БИЛЕТЫ ВСЕ ПРОДАНЫ.

Вторник, 20-го Января. въ 3-й разъ: „Вишневый садъ“.

Касса (средний подъезд) открыта от 10 час. утра до 9 час. вечера.

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Dec. 18 1904 : H. A. Mott, Oyster Point, San Mateo, Panama.

Товарищу ИКЕРПАНСКИХ Никитычову Тарасу Викторовичу Дарю его супруге Т. де Союз А. и Семье.

Programme for the première of *The Cherry Orchard* in the Moscow Art Theatre on January 17, 1904



MOSCOW ART THEATRE PRODUCTION OF *THE CHERRY ORCHARD* (1904) DIRECTOR:  
STANISLAVSKY



Panovskaya—O. I. Knipper



Gayev—K. S. Stanislavsky



Gayev—K. S. Stanislavsky, Anya—M. P. Liliina



Yepikhodov—I. M. Moskvín



Charlotta—E. P. Muratova, Lopakhin—  
L. M. Leonidov



Scene from Act I

Trofimov—V. I. Kachalov, Anya—M. P. Lili  
lina





Scenes from Act III

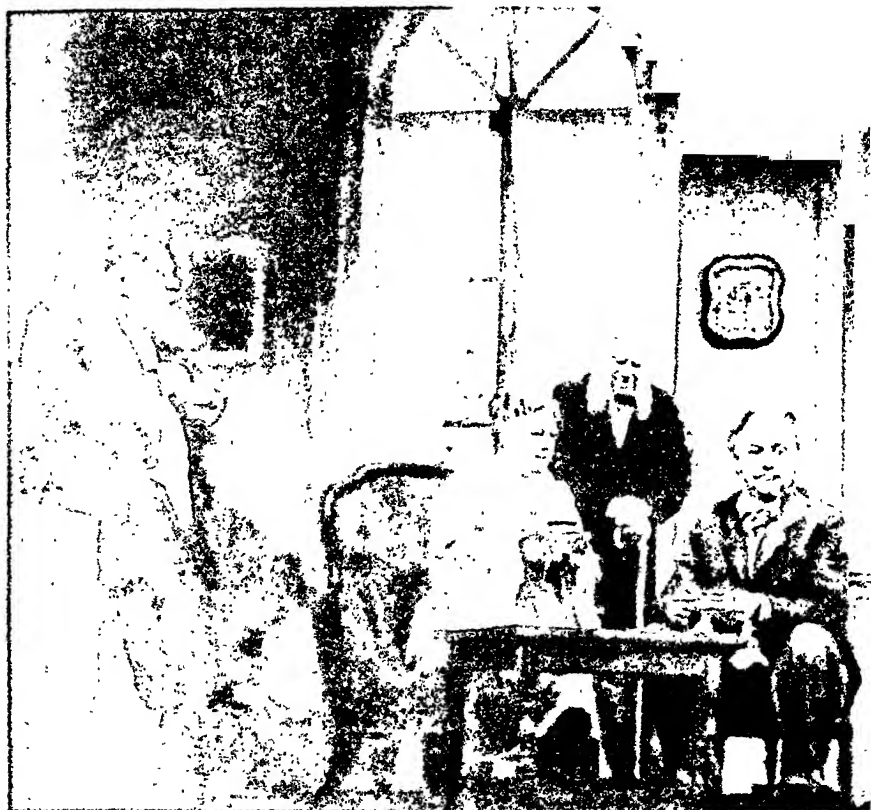




Трофимов—В. I. Качалов, Раневская—  
О. Л. Книппер, Аня—М. П. Лилина

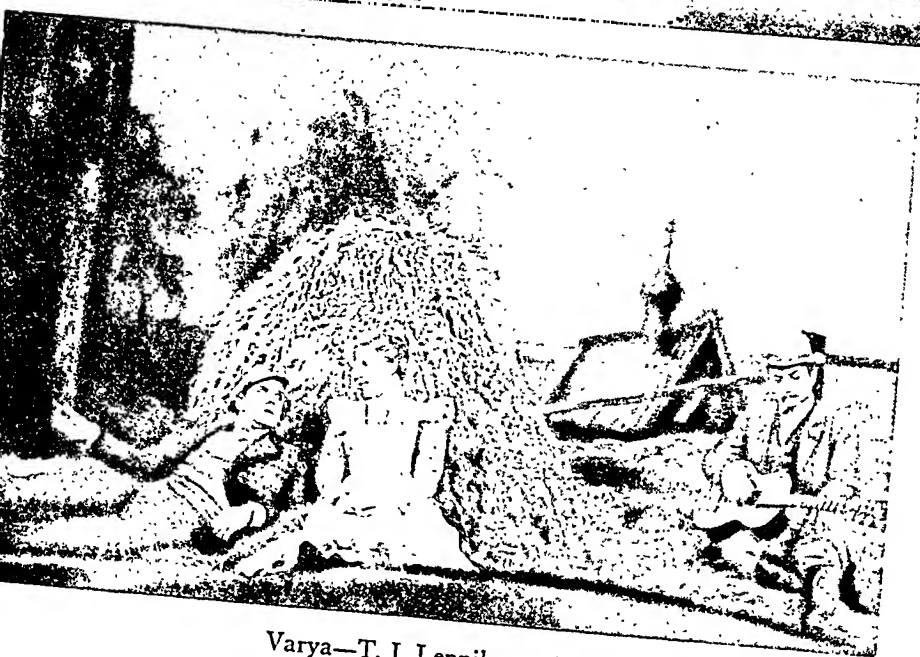


Feers—A. R. Artem

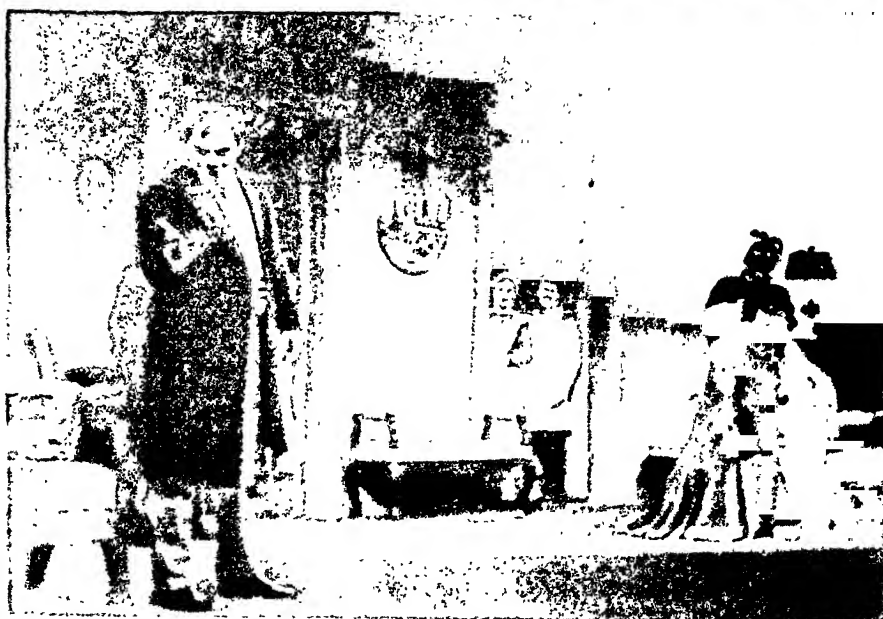


Scene from Act I

MOSCOW ART THEATRE PRODUCTION OF *THE CHERRY ORCHARD* (1953)  
DIRECTOR: STANITSIN



Varya—T. I. Lennikova, Anya— L. G. Kachanova  
Yasha—Y. L. Leonidov, Dunyasha—  
K. I. Rostovtseva, Yepikhodov—A. M. Komissarov



Scenes from Act III



Ranevskaya—A. K. Tarasova, Lopakhin—  
M. N. Zimin



Ranevskaya—A. K. Tarasova, Anya—  
L. G. Kachanova, Gayev— P. V. Massalsky

We should find somewhere else for him, even if it's just till the warmer weather comes. Now Irina's room would be just right for the baby. It's dry and it gets the sun all day. We must tell her to share with Olga for the time being. She's never at home in the daytime, in any case. She only sleeps here. (*Pause.*) Why don't you say something, Andy dear?

ANDREI. Oh, I was just thinking. Anyway, there's nothing I can say, is there?

NATASHA. Let me think . . . there's something I had to tell you. . . . Oh, yes. Ferapont has come from the Council. He's asking for you.

ANDREI (*yawning*). Send him up.

Natasha goes out. Andrei picks up the candle she has forgotten and reads his book. Enter Ferapont; he is wearing an old, tattered coat with the collar turned up and a scarf round his ears to keep them warm

ANDREI. Hello, old man. What is it, then?

FERAPONT. The chairman has sent you this book and some papers. Here you are, Master Andrei. (*Hands him a book and a packet.*)

ANDREI. Thank you. That's fine. But why have you come so late? It's after eight.

FERAPONT. Eh?

ANDREI (*more loudly*). I said, it's late, after eight o'clock.

FERAPONT. That's right. It were still light when I got here, but they wouldn't let me see you. Said you was busy. Well, if he's busy, he's busy, I thinks to myself. I ain't in any great hurry. (*Thinking that Andrei is asking him something.*) Eh?

ANDREI. Nothing. (*Looks at the book.*) Tomorrow's Friday. It's not one of my days, but I'll go down to the Council all the same . . . and get on with some work. It's so dull at home. (*Pause.*) What strange turns life takes, old man, how it deceives us. Today, for want of anything better to do, out of sheer boredom, I happened to pick up this book—my old university lecture notes—and I thought how ridiculous it was. Here am I, secretary of the Local Council, the one that has Protopopov as chair-



man and me as secretary, and the very most I can hope for is to be a member of the Council. For me to be a member of the Local Council, me who dreams each night that I am a professor at Moscow University, a famous scholar of whom all Russia is proud!

FERAPONT. I couldn't rightly say, Master Andrei. My hearing's not what it ought to be.

ANDREI. If you could hear properly I probably wouldn't be talking to you. I must talk to somebody. My wife doesn't understand me, and I'm afraid of my sisters, for some reason, afraid that they will laugh at me, or reproach me. I don't drink and I don't like public houses, but how I'd love to be in Moscow now sitting at Testov's or the Bolshoi Moscow restaurant, old man.

FERAPONT. The contractor at the Council were saying t'other day that some merchants got together and started eating pancakes in Moscow. One of them ate forty and popped off. Or was it fifty? I can't remember.

ANDREI. You sit in a large Moscow restaurant, you don't know anyone and no one knows you, but all the same you don't feel like a stranger. Yet here you know everyone and everyone knows you, but you are a stranger. A complete stranger, all on your own.

FERAPONT. Eh? (*Pause.*) And that contractor said—maybe he were lying—that there's a great cable running right across Moscow.

ANDREI. What for?

FERAPONT. I wouldn't know, Master. It were the contractor who said so.

ANDREI. Nonsense. (*Reads his book.*) Have you ever been to Moscow?

FERAPONT (*after a pause*). No, Master. The good Lord didn't will it. (*Pause.*) Can I go now?

ANDREI. Yes, you can. Good-bye, old fellow. (*Ferapont goes out.*) Good-bye, old fellow. (*Reading.*) Come here tomorrow and collect these papers. Off you go. (*Pause.*) Oh, he's gone. (*A bell rings.*) Yes, there's work to be done. (*Stretches and goes leisurely into his room.*)

Off-stage the nanny is singing as she rocks the baby to sleep. Enter Masha and Vershinin. While they are talking the chambermaid lights the lamp and candles

MASHA. I don't know. Of course, it may be mainly a question of habit. After Father died, for instance, it took us a long time to get used to not having orderlies. But I think that fairness as well as habit prompts me to say this. Perhaps it is different in other places, but in our town the most decent, high-minded and educated people are the army men.

VERSHININ. I'm thirsty. I'd love some tea.

MASHA (*looking at her watch*). They'll be serving it soon. They married me off when I was eighteen. I was afraid of my husband because he was a schoolmaster and I had only just left school. I thought he was terribly learned, clever and important. It's different now, unfortunately.

VERSHININ. I see . . . yes.

MASHA. I'm not talking about my husband. I've got used to him. But so many civilians are rude, discourteous and uneducated. I can't help being upset, insulted, by rudeness. It pains me to see that a person is insufficiently sensitive, obliging or courteous. I find it painful to be in the company of teachers, my husband's colleagues.

VERSHININ. Yes, but all the same I don't think there's much difference between civilians and army men, at least in this town. Listen to any educated person here, a civilian or an officer, and he'll tell you that he's fed up with his wife or his house or his estate or his horses. Why does a Russian, who is by nature a most high-minded person, aim so low in his own life? Tell me?

MASHA. Why?

VERSHININ. Why is he fed up with his children and his wife? And why are his wife and children fed up with him?

MASHA. You're not in a very good mood today.

VERSHININ. Perhaps I'm not. I haven't had any lunch today. Haven't eaten a thing since breakfast. My daughter's not very well. When my little girls are ill I get very alarmed and conscience-stricken that they have a mother like her. Oh, if you could have seen her today! How petty she is! We started quarrelling at seven o'clock, and at nine I slammed the door and walked out. (*Pause.*) I never talk about this to anyone. It's strange that I should be

complaining about it to you. (*Kisses her hand.*) Don't be angry with me. I've nobody but you—nobody. (*Pause.*)

MASHA. Listen to the wind howling in the stove. It howled like that just before Father died. Exactly like that.

VERSHININ. Are you superstitious?

MASHA. Yes.

VERSHININ. That's strange. (*Kisses her hand.*) You're a magnificent, wonderful woman. Magnificent and wonderful. It's dark here, but I can see your eyes shining.

MASHA (*sits down on another chair*). There's more light here.

VERSHININ. I love you, I love you, I love you. I love your eyes, your movements. I dream about them. You magnificent, wonderful woman.

MASHA (*laughing softly*). When you talk to me like that, I can't help laughing, although I go cold with fright. Don't say it again, I beg you. (*In an undertone.*) Oh, do, then. I don't mind. (*Covers her face with her hands.*) I don't care. There's someone coming. Talk about something else.

Enter Irina and Tusenbach through the hall

TUSENBACH. I've got a triple-barrelled name. I'm actually Baron Tusenbach-Krone-Altschauer. But I'm Russian and Orthodox like you. There's hardly anything German about me, unless it's my patience and the persistence with which I am boring you. I escort you home every evening.

IRINA. I'm so tired!

TUSENBACH. And I shall come to the telegraph office and see you home each day. For ten years or twenty years, until you send me away. (*Noticing Masha and Vershinin, delightedly.*) Oh, it's you! Hello!

IRINA. Home at last! (*To Masha.*) A woman came in just now to send a telegram to her brother in Saratov saying that her son had died this morning, but she couldn't remember his address. She sent it off like that without an address, just Saratov. She was crying. I was rude to her for no reason at all. I told her I hadn't got all day. It was so stupid. Are the mummers coming tonight?

MASHA. Yes.

IRINA (*sitting down in an armchair*). Must have a rest. I'm so tired!

TUSENBACH (*with a smile*). When you come home after work you look so young and wretched. (*Pause.*)

IRINA. I'm so tired. I don't like the telegraph office. I really don't.

MASHA. You've got thinner. (*Whistles.*) And younger looking. Your face looks very boyish.

TUSENBACH. That's the haircut.

IRINA. I must find another job. This one doesn't suit me. It just hasn't got the things I wanted so badly, the things I dreamed of. . . . It's work without poetry, without thought. . . . (*A knock on the floor.*) That's the doctor. (*To Tusenbach.*) Knock back, will you, dear. I can't . . . I'm so tired.

Tusenbach knocks on the floor

IRINA. He'll be here in a minute. Something must be done. The doctor and Andrei were at the club yesterday and they lost again. Apparently Andrei lost two hundred roubles.

MASHA (*indifferently*). What can we do about it now?

IRINA. He lost two weeks ago and in December. I wish he'd lose everything, then perhaps we could get out of this town. Oh, dear. I dream about Moscow every night. It's as if I were quite crazy. (*Laughs.*) We're going there in June, but there's February, March, April, May—almost half a year to go before then.

MASHA. Natasha mustn't find out about his losses.

IRINA. I don't think she could care less.

Chebutykin who has just got up—he has been having a nap after lunch—comes into the hall and combs his beard, then sits down at the table and takes out a newspaper

MASHA. Here he is. Has he paid the rent?

IRINA (*laughs*). No. Hasn't paid a penny for eight months. He must have forgotten.

MASHA (*laughs*). How grandly he's sitting there.

They all laugh; pause

IRINA. Why are you so quiet, Colonel?

VERSHININ. I don't know. I'm dying for some tea. My kingdom for a cup of tea! I haven't eaten anything since breakfast.

CHEBUTYKIN. Miss Irina.

IRINA. Yes?

CHEBUTYKIN. Come here, please. Venez ici. (*Irina goes and sits at the table.*) I like having you next to me. (*Irina lays out a game of patience.*)

VERSHININ. Well, then. If we can't have tea, let's at least do have a little philosophising.

TUSENBACH. I'm game. What's the subject?

VERSHININ. The subject? Let's imagine what life will be like in, say, two or three hundred years' time.

TUSENBACH. Why? People will fly in balloons, there will be a new fashion in men's jackets, and they may discover a sixth sense, but life will remain the same—hard, full of mysteries, and happy. In a thousand years' time people will still sigh and say, "Oh, how hard life is!" Yet they will be just as afraid of death and just as reluctant to die as they are now.

VERSHININ (*after a moment's thought*). I'm not so sure. I think that everything on earth will gradually change. That it is already changing before our eyes. In two hundred, three hundred or perhaps a thousand years—the space of time is not important—a new and happy life will begin. We won't take part in it, of course, but we are living for it now, working and, well, suffering for it. We are creating it. Therein lies the aim of our existence and, if you like, our happiness.

Masha laughs softly

TUSENBACH. Why are you laughing?

MASHA. I don't know. I've been laughing all day.

VERSHININ. I finished my education at the same point as you. I didn't go on to the academy. I read a great deal, but I don't know how to select books and perhaps I don't read what I ought. Yet the longer I live, the more I want to know. My hair is turning grey and I shall soon be an old man, but I know so little—so little. All the same I am quite convinced of the main thing, the most impor-

tant thing. If only I could show you that there is no such thing as happiness for us, and that there ought not and will not be. All we must do is work, work. Happiness is for our distant descendants. (*Pause.*) If not for me, then at least for the descendants of my descendants.

Fedotik and Rodé appear in the hall. They sit down and begin to sing quietly, playing a guitar

TUSENBACH. So you think we should not even dream of happiness. But what if I am happy?

VERSHININ. You're not.

TUSENBACH (*flinging up his arms and laughing*). We obviously don't understand each other. How am I to convince you?

Masha laughs softly

TUSENBACH (*wiggling his finger*). There, laugh at that! (*To Vershinin.*) Not only two or three hundred years from now, but a million years from now life will still be the same as it always has been. It does not change. It remains constant, following its own laws which are no concern of ours or, at least, which we will never know. Migrant birds, cranes, for example, fly on and on and whatever thoughts, great or small, may be passing through their heads, they will still go on flying, without knowing where or why. They will go on flying however many philosophers may appear among them. Let them philosophise as much as they like, as long as they go on flying.

MASHA. But there must be a meaning?

TUSENBACH. A meaning. . . . Look, it's snowing. What meaning is there in that? (*Pause.*)

MASHA. I think a person must believe in something, or must search for a faith, otherwise his life is empty, quite empty. To live and not to know why cranes fly, why children are born, why there are stars in the sky. . . . You must know what you are living for, otherwise everything is nonsense, nothing matters. (*Pause.*)

VERSHININ. All the same it's a pity not to be young any more.

MASHA. As Gogol says: "It's a boring life, my friends!"

TUSENBACH. And as I say, you're difficult to argue with, my friends! Bother you!

CHEBUTYKIN (*reading the newspaper*). Balzac was married in Berdichev.

Irina sings softly

CHEBUTYKIN. I'll make a note of that. (*Writes in his notebook.*) Balzac was married in Berdichev. (*Goes on reading the paper.*)

IRINA (*laying out a game of patience, reflectively*). Balzac was married in Berdichev.

TUSENBACH. The die is cast. (*To Masha.*) Did you know that I have sent in my resignation?

MASHA. Yes, I had heard. I don't see anything good about that. I don't like civilians.

TUSENBACH. It makes no difference. (*Gets up.*) What sort of an army man am I? I'm not handsome. But what does it matter? I'm going to work. To work for at least one day in my life so hard that I come home in the evening, collapse on the bed and go to sleep straightway. (*Going into the hall.*) Labourers must sleep very soundly.

FEDOTIK (*to Irina*). I've just bought these coloured crayons for you at Pyzhikov's in Moscow Street. And this penknife.

IRINA. You're used to treating me as a child, but I'm grown up now. (*Takes the crayons and penknife.*) Aren't they nice!

FEDOTIK. I bought a penknife for myself as well. Look. Here's one blade, and another, and a third, that one's to clean your ears, and these are to clean your finger nails.

RODÉ. How old are you, Doctor?

CHEBUTYKIN. Me? Thirty-two! (*Laughter.*)

FEDOTIK. I'll show you another way of playing patience. (*Lays out the cards.*)

The samovar is brought in; Anfissa bustles round it; a little later Natasha comes in and also busies herself around the table. Enter Solyony who greets everyone and then sits down at the table

VERSHININ. Just listen to that wind!

MASHA. Yes. I'm sick of the winter. I've already forgotten what summer is like.

IRINA. This patience is coming out, I can see. We'll be going to Moscow.

FEDOTIK. No, it isn't. Look, you've put the eight on the two of spades. (*Laughs.*) That means you won't be going to Moscow.

CHEBUTYKIN (*reading the newspaper*). Small-pox epidemic in Tsitsihar.

ANFISSA (*coming up to Masha*). Have some tea, Masha, my love. (*To Vershinin.*) And you too, sir. Begging yer pardon, but I've forgotten your name.

MASHA. Bring it here, Nanny. I won't come over there.

IRINA. Nanny!

ANFISSA. Coming.

NATASHA (*to Solyony*). Babies do understand, you know. "Hello, Bobbikins," I said. "Hello, my little love!" And he gave me such a special look. You think I'm only saying that because I'm his mother, don't you? But it's not true. He's a very unusual child.

SOLYONY. If he were my child, I would fry him in a frying pan and then gobble him all up. (*Takes his glass into the drawing-room and sits down in a corner.*)

NATASHA (*covering her face with her hands*). What a bad-mannered man!

MASHA. Happy is the person who doesn't notice whether it is summer or winter. I wouldn't care about the weather if I were in Moscow.

VERSHININ. I've just read a diary written by a French minister while he was in prison. The minister was sentenced for the Panama business. He was so ecstatic about the birds which he could see through the window of his cell and had never noticed before when he was a minister. Now that he's been released he doesn't notice them any more, of course. And you won't notice Moscow when you are actually living there. There is no happiness for us and never can be. We only go on wanting it.

TUSENBACH (*picks up a box from the table*). Where are the sweets?

IRINA. Solyony ate them.

TUSENBACH. All of them?

ANFISSA (*bringing the tea*). A letter for you, sir.



VERSHININ. For me? (*Takes the letter.*) It's from my daughter. (*Reads.*) Yes, of course. . . . (*To Masha.*) Please excuse me, if I slip out. I won't have any tea, thank you. (*Stands up, agitatedly.*) It's always the same old thing.

MASHA. What's the matter? If you don't mind my asking.

VERSHININ (*quietly*). My wife has tried to poison herself again. I must go. I'll slip out without saying good-bye. All this is most unpleasant. (*Kisses Masha's hand.*) My dear. You fine, wonderful woman. I'll slip out this way. (*Goes out.*)

ANFISSA. Where's he gone? I've just brought his tea. There's a fine one for you!

MASHA (*angrily*). Leave off! Stop pestering. You never leave anyone alone. (*Takes her cup to the table.*) I'm fed up with you, old woman.

ANFISSA. What's made you so angry, love?

ANDREI'S VOICE: Anfissa!

ANFISSA (*imitating him*). Anfissa! Sitting there in his room. . . . (*Goes off.*)

MASHA (*by the table in the hall, angrily*). Move over so I can sit down. (*Mixes up the cards.*) Cards spread all over the place. Drink up your tea.

IRINA. You're in a temper, Masha.

MASHA. If I'm in a temper, don't talk to me. And don't touch me.

CHEBUTYKIN (*laughing*). Touch her not, touch her not. . . .

MASHA. You are sixty years old, yet you're always saying a lot of damn rubbish, just like a little boy.

NATASHA (*sighs*). My dear Masha, why must you use such language? With your attractive looks, I tell you quite frankly, you would be simply a great success in high society, if it weren't for the language you use. Je vous prie, pardonnez moi, Marie, mais vous avez des manières un peu grossières.

TUSENBACH (*trying not to laugh*). Pass me . . . pass me . . . I think that's brandy. . . .

NATASHA. Il paraît que mon Bobbikins déjà ne dort pas. He's woken up. He's not well today. I must go and see him. Excuse me. (*Goes off.*)

IRINA. Where has Colonel Vershinin gone?

MASHA. Home. There's something the matter with his wife again.

TUSENBACH (*goes up to Solyony carrying a decanter of brandy*). You're forever sitting on your own thinking about something—goodness knows what. Come on, let's make it up. Let's have a drink of brandy. (*They drink.*) I shall have to play the piano all night, probably lots of sentimental rubbish. Never mind!

SOLYONY. Why make it up? We haven't quarrelled.

TUSENBACH. You always make me feel as if something has happened between us. You are a strange person, you must admit.

SOLYONY (*reciting*). I am strange, yet who is not. Do not be angry, Aleko.

TUSENBACH. What's Aleko got to do with it? (*Pause.*)

SOLYONY. When I'm alone with someone, it's all right. I'm like everyone else. But in company I get shy, depressed, and talk all sorts of nonsense. Yet I'm more honest and upright than very many other people. I can prove it.

TUSENBACH. I often get angry with you. You are always picking quarrels with me in company. But for some reason I like you all the same. Come what may, I'm getting drunk today. Cheers!

SOLYONY. Cheers! (*They drink.*) I've never had anything against you, Baron. It's just that I'm like Lermontov. (*Quietly.*) I even look a little like him . . . people say. (*Takes a bottle of perfume from his pocket and pours it over his hands.*)

TUSENBACH. I'm resigning. Basta! I've been thinking about it for five years and at last I've made up my mind. I'm going to work.

SOLYONY (*reciting*). Do not be angry, Aleko. Forget, forget your dreams.

While they are talking Andrei comes in with a book quietly and sits down by a candle

TUSENBACH. I'm going to work.

CHEBUTYKIN (*coming into the drawing-room with Irina*). And it was real Caucasian food: onion soup, followed by roast *chekartma* for the meat course.

SOLYONY. *Cheremsha* isn't meat at all. It's a vegetable like an onion.

CHEBUTYKIN. No, my dear fellow. *Chechartma* isn't an onion, it's roast lamb.

SOLYONY. I tell you that *cheremsha* is an onion.

CHEBUTYKIN. And I tell you that *chechartma* is lamb.

SOLYONY. And I tell you that *cheremsha* is an onion.

CHEBUTYKIN. What's the point in arguing with you. You've never been to the Caucasus and never eaten *chechartma*.

SOLYONY. I've never eaten it, because I can't stand it. It smells like garlic.

ANDREI (*imploringly*). That's enough, gentlemen. I beg you.

TUSENBACH. When are the mummers coming?

IRINA. They said at nine. That means they'll be here any minute.

TUSENBACH (*embraces Andrei*). Oh, my cottage, my new cottage. . . .

ANDREI (*dances and sings*). My new cottage made of maple. . . .

CHEBUTYKIN (*dances*). With a trellis too! (*Laughter.*)

TUSENBACH (*kisses Andrei*). Damn it, let's have a drink. Let's have our first proper drink together, Andrei. I'm coming with you, Andrei, to Moscow, to the university.

SOLYONY. Which one? There are two universities in Moscow.

ANDREI. There's only one university in Moscow.

SOLYONY. And I say there are two.

ANDREI. Make it three, if you like. The more the better.

SOLYONY. There are two universities in Moscow! (*Murmurs of protest and disagreement.*) Two universities, the old one and the new one. But if you don't like listening to me, if my words irritate you, I'll keep quiet. I can even go into another room. (*Goes out through one of the doors.*)

TUSENBACH. Bravo! Bravo! (*Laughs.*) You may begin, ladies and gentlemen. I'm going to play now! That Solyony is a funny fellow. (*Sits down at the piano and starts playing a waltz.*)

MASHA (*waltzing by herself*). The baron is drunk, tra la, tra la, the baron is drunk, tra la, tra la.

Enter Natasha

NATASHA (*to Chebutykin*). Doctor! (*Says something to Chebutykin, then goes out quietly. Chebutykin taps Tusenbach on the shoulder and whispers something to him.*)

IRINA. What's the matter?

CHEBUTYKIN. It's time we were going. Good-bye all.

TUSENBACH. Good-night. It's time we were off.

IRINA. What do you mean? What about the mumm-  
mers?

ANDREI (*embarrassed*). They're not coming. You see, dear, Natasha says that Bobbikins isn't feeling well and so. . . . Oh, I don't know. I couldn't care less.

IRINA (*shrugging her shoulders*). Bobbikins isn't feeling well!

MASHA. Well, I'll be damned! So we're being thrown out. (*To Irina.*) She's the one who's ill, not Bobbikins. Up here! (*Taps her forehead.*) The stupid, selfish creature.

Andrei goes out through the door right to his room, followed by Chebutykin; the rest say good-bye to one another

FEDOTIK. What a shame! I'd counted on spending the evening here, but if the baby's ill . . . of course . . . I'll bring him a toy tomorrow.

RODÉ (*loudly*). I had a nap after lunch today, specially. Thought I'd be up dancing all night. It's only nine o'clock!

MASHA. Let's go outside and talk. We'll decide what to do there.

Someone says "Good-bye! All the best!" Tusenbach laughs. They all go out. Anfissa and the maid clear the table and put out the lights. Anfissa sings to herself. Andrei enters in his coat and hat with Chebutykin

CHEBUTYKIN. I never married, because life flashed past like lightning and because I was madly in love with your mother, who was married already.

ANDREI. No one should get married. It's boring.

CHEBUTYKIN. Maybe, but what about being lonely. Say what you like but loneliness is a terrible thing, my

friend. Although, when all's said and done . . . it makes no difference one way or the other.

ANDREI. Let's go quickly.

CHEBUTYKIN. What's the hurry? We've plenty of time.

ANDREI. I'm afraid my wife may stop me.

CHEBUTYKIN. Oh, I see.

ANDREI. I won't play today. I'll just sit and watch. I'm not feeling well. What can I do about being short-winded, Doctor?

CHEBUTYKIN. Why ask me? I don't remember, dear boy. I don't know.

ANDREI. Let's go out through the kitchen. (*They go out.*)

There is a ring at the door, followed by another, and the sound of voices and laughing

IRINA (*comes in*). What's that?

ANFISSA (*in a whisper*). The mummers. (*Another ring.*)

IRINA. Tell them there's no one at home, Nanny. Say we're sorry.

Anfissa goes off. Irina walks round the room, deep in thought. She is upset. Enter Solyony

SOLYONY (*puzzled*). They've all gone. Where is everybody?

IRINA. They've gone home.

SOLYONY. That's strange. Are you on your own?

IRINA. Yes. (*Pause.*) Good-night.

SOLYONY. I behaved indiscreetly and tactlessly just now. But you are different from the rest. You are pure and high-minded. You can see the truth. You alone can understand me. I love you. I love you deeply, eternally.

IRINA. Good-night. Please go now.

SOLYONY. I can't live without you. (*Following her around.*) Oh, my bliss! (*Through tears.*) My happiness! I have never seen such lovely, exquisite eyes in any other woman.

IRINA (*coldly*). Please don't.

SOLYONY. This is the first time I have spoken to you of my love and I feel as if I were on another planet. (*Rubs his forehead.*) Oh well, what does it matter. I can't force you to love me, of course. But I won't suffer a successful rival. Oh, no. I swear to you by all that is sacred that I shall kill my rival. Oh, my wonderful one.

Natasha comes in with a candle

NATASHA (*looks into one room, then another and walks past the door of her husband's room*). Andrei's in there. Let him go on reading. (*To Solyony.*) Excuse me, I didn't know you were here. I'm not dressed for guests.

SOLYONY. It doesn't matter. Good-bye. (*Goes off.*)

NATASHA. You're tired, my poor dear. (*Kisses Irina.*) You ought to go to bed earlier.

IRINA. Is Bobbikins asleep?

NATASHA. Yes, but he's restless. By the way, Irina. I keep meaning to tell you, but either you're out or I'm busy. I think Bobbikins' room is too cold and damp. Yours would be just right for him. Be a good girl and move in with Olga for the time being.

IRINA (*not understanding*). Where?

Sound of harness bells on a troika driving up to the house

NATASHA. You and Olga can share a room for a while and Bobbikins will have your room. He's such a dear little lad. Today I said to him, "You're mine, Bobbikins. Mine!" and he gave me such a look with his sweet little eyes. (*The doorbell rings.*) That must be Olga. How late she is!

The maid goes up to her and whispers something in her ear

NATASHA. Protopopov? The funny man. Protopopov's arrived and wants me to go for a ride in his troika. (*Laughs.*) Aren't men funny? (*The doorbell rings.*) There's somebody at the door. Perhaps I'll go for a short drive after all. . . . (*To the maid.*) I'll be down in a minute. (*The doorbell rings.*) The doorbell again. That must be Olga. (*Goes out.*)

The maid runs out. Irina sits lost in thought. Enter Kulygin and Olga followed by Vershinin

KULYGIN. Well, how's that for you? And they said there was going to be a party.

VERSHININ. That's strange. I was here not long ago, about half an hour, and they were expecting the mums.

IRINA. Everyone's gone.

KULYGIN. Masha as well? Where has she gone? And why is Protopopov waiting downstairs in his troika? Who's he waiting for?

IRINA. Don't keep asking me questions. I'm tired.

KULYGIN. Oh, alright, if you're in a mood....

OLGA. The meeting has only just finished. I'm worn out. Our headmistress is ill and I am deputising for her. I have such a dreadful headache. (*Sits down.*) Andrei lost two hundred roubles at cards last night. The whole town's talking about it.

KULYGIN. Yes. I'm tired after a meeting, as well. (*Sits down.*)

VERSHININ. My wife decided to give me a fright just now, and had another go at poisoning herself. It's alright now, and I'm glad. I can have a rest. So we've got to go, have we? Well, never mind. All the best to you. Let's go somewhere, Kulygin. I can't bear staying at home. I really can't. Come along.

KULYGIN. I'm too tired. I can't come with you. (*Gets up.*) I'm too tired. Has my wife gone home?

IRINA. I expect so.

KULYGIN (*kisses Irina's hand*). Good-bye. No work tomorrow or the day after. All the best! (*Walks off.*) I'd love a cup of tea. I was expecting to spend the evening in pleasant company and—o, fallacem hominum spem!<sup>\*</sup> Accusative case for interjections.

VERSHININ. Well, I'll go on my own then. (*Goes off with Kulygin, whistling.*)

OLGA. I have such a dreadful headache. Andrei lost at cards... the whole town's talking about it. I'll go and lie down. (*Walks off.*) Tomorrow I'm free. Oh, how wonderful! I'm free tomorrow and the day after. This dreadful headache. (*Goes off.*)

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\* Oh, how delusive is human hope!

IRINA (*alone*). Everyone's gone. There's no one left.

The sounds of an accordion outside and Anfissa singing

NATASHA (*walks across the hall in her fur coat and hat, followed by the maid*). I'll be back in half an hour. I'm just going for a little drive. (*Goes off.*)

IRINA (*left alone, longingly*). To Moscow, to Moscow, to Moscow!

### *Curtain*

## ACT THREE

Olga's and Irina's room. Right and left are screened-off beds. It is getting on for three o'clock in the morning. The alarm is sounding for a fire which started some time ago. It is obvious that no one in the house has gone to bed yet. Masha is lying on the divan, wearing a black dress as usual. Enter Olga and Anfissa

ANFISSA. Now they're sitting downstairs by the staircase. I says to them, "Why don't you go upstairs. You're not comfortable there." "We don't know where Dad is," they says, crying their eyes out. "Let's hope to goodness he hasn't died in the fire". Just think of that! And there are some more in the yard—in their night clothes, as well.

OLGA (*takes some dresses out of the wardrobe*). Take this grey one . . . and this one. . . . And the cardigan as well. And this skirt, Nanny. What a dreadful thing to happen. Kirsanov Street seems to have been burnt down completely. Take this one. And this one. (*Flings a dress into her hands.*) The poor Vershinins were frightened to death. Their house nearly burnt down. They should spend the night here. We mustn't let them go home. Poor Fedotik's place has been burnt down to the ground. He's lost everything.

ANFISSA. Ask Ferapont to give me a hand, Olga. I can't carry it all on my own.

OLGA (*rings the servants' bell*). They don't seem to hear. (*Through the door.*) Come here, whoever's out there. (*Through the open door you can see a window red from*



*the glow of the fire. A fire engine is heard going past the house.*) How dreadful it is! And how exhausting!

Enter Ferapont

OLGA. Take these downstairs and give them to the Kolotilin girls. And this, too.

FERAPONT. Yes, Miss. There was a fire in Moscow, too, in 1812. Goodness me! The Frenchies got the surprise of their life.

OLGA. Get along with you.

FERAPONT. Yes, Miss. (*Goes out.*)

OLGA. Give everything away, Nanny dear. We don't need anything. Give it all away, Nanny. I'm so tired I can hardly stand up. Don't let the Vershinins go home. The girls can sleep in the drawing-room, and we'll put the Colonel in with the Baron. Fedotik can go in with the Baron as well, or in the hall. The doctor's drunk, terribly drunk, now of all times, so we can't put anybody in with him. And Mrs Vershinin can sleep in the drawing-room as well.

ANFISSA (*exhausted*). Don't turn me out of the house, Olga! Please don't!

OLGA. What nonsense you're talking, Nanny! Nobody's going to turn you out.

ANFISSA (*resting her head on Olga's breast*). I do work, Olga, my love, I earn my keep. But when I get old and weak, they'll throw me out. And where will I go? I ask you. I'm in my eighties. Eighty-two next birthday.

OLGA. Sit down, Nanny. You're exhausted, you poor thing. (*Makes her sit down.*) Have a rest. You've gone quite pale.

Enter Natasha

NATASHA. They are talking about starting a fund for people whose homes have been burnt down. Why not? It's a very good idea. We must do all we can to help the poor. That's the duty of rich folk. Bobbikins and Sophie are sleeping peacefully as if nothing had happened. There are so many people in here, all over the place, the house is full of them. And there's a flu epidemic in the town. I'm afraid the children will catch it.

OLGA (*not listening to her*). You can't see the fire from this room. It's quiet in here. . . .

NATASHA. Yes . . . I must look an awful mess. (*In front of the mirror.*) They say I've put on weight, but it's not true. Not true at all. Masha's asleep. Worn out, the poor thing. (*To Anfissa, coldly.*) How dare you sit in my presence! Get up! Get out of here! (*Anfissa goes out. Pause.*) I can't understand why you keep that old woman on.

OLGA (*dumbfounded*). I'm sorry, but I don't understand either. . . .

NATASHA. She's no use at all here. She's a peasant and she should live in the country. She's terribly spoilt. I like order in a house. There shouldn't be any useless people around. (*Strokes her cheek.*) You're tired, poor thing. Our headmistress is tired. When my Sophie grows up and goes to school, I shall be afraid of you.

OLGA. I'm not going to be headmistress.

NATASHA. They're going to appoint you, Olga. It's already been decided.

OLGA. I'll refuse. I can't. I haven't got the strength. (*Takes a drink of water.*) You were so rude to Nanny just now. I'm sorry, but I can't bear it in my present state. It made me quite faint.

NATASHA (*excitedly*). I'm sorry, Olga. I'm sorry. I didn't want to upset you.

Masha gets up, takes her pillow and goes out angrily

OLGA. Try to understand, my dear. We may have been brought up in a rather strange way, but I can't bear that. I find that sort of behaviour quite intolerable. It makes me ill. It depresses me terribly.

NATASHA. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. (*Kisses her.*)

OLGA. The slightest rudeness, a roughly spoken word, upsets me.

NATASHA. I often say things I shouldn't, it's true. But you must agree, Olga, she could live in the country.

OLGA. She's been with us for thirty years.

NATASHA. But she can't work now. Either I don't

understand or you won't understand me. She's not capable of working. She only sleeps or sits around.

OLGA. Well, let her sit around.

NATASHA (*amazed*). Let her sit around! But she's a servant. (*Through tears.*) I don't understand you, Olga. I have a nanny, a wet nurse, a maid and a cook. What do we want that old woman for?

Fire alarm off-stage

OLGA. I've aged ten years tonight.

NATASHA. We'll have to come to an agreement, Olga. You're in charge at school, and I'm in charge at home. You've got your teaching, and I've got the house to run. If I say something about the servants, I know what I'm talking about. I know what I am talking about! I want that thieving old hag out of the house by tomorrow! (*Stamps her foot.*) The old witch! Don't you dare annoy me! Don't you dare! (*Pulling herself together.*) If you don't move downstairs, we'll always be quarrelling. It's awful.

Enter Kulygin

KULYGIN. Where's Masha? It's time we went home. They say the fire is dying down now. (*Stretches.*) Only one district's burnt down, in spite of the wind. At first it looked as though the whole town was burning. (*Sits down.*) I'm worn out. Olga, my dear. I often think I would have married you, if it hadn't been for Masha. You're so good. I'm exhausted. (*Listens.*)

OLGA. What is it?

KULYGIN. The doctor is on a drinking spree, now of all times. He's as drunk as a lord. Now of all times! (*Gets up.*) I think he's coming. Can you hear him? Yes, he is. (*Laughs.*) What a devil he is, eh! I'll keep out of the way. (*Walks over to the cupboard and stands in the corner.*) What a rascal!

OLGA. He's kept off drink for two years, and now he goes and gets drunk all of a sudden. (*Walks into the background with Natasha.*)

Enter Chebutykin; he walks round the room as if he were sober, without staggering, stops, looks around, then goes to the washbasin and begins to wash his hands

CHEBUTYKIN (*morosely*). Damn and blast the lot of them! They think I am a doctor, that I can cure all sorts of diseases, but I don't know a bloody thing. I've forgotten everything I used to know. I can't remember a bloody thing. (*Olga and Natasha go out unnoticed by him.*) Damn it! Last Wednesday I treated a woman in Zassip Street and she died. It was all my fault. Yes . . . I did know something twenty-five years ago, say, but now I can't remember a bloody thing. Perhaps I'm not a human being at all. Perhaps I'm only pretending that I have hands and feet and a head. Perhaps I don't exist at all and only imagine that I am walking about, eating and sleeping. (*Weeps.*) Oh, if only I didn't exist! (*Stops crying, morosely.*) Damn it! The day before yesterday everyone was talking about Shakespeare and Voltaire at the club. I've never read either of them, but I pretended I had. And so did the others. It's disgusting. Degrading. What with thinking about the woman I killed on Wednesday, and everything else, I began to feel such a rat, such a filthy fraud, that I went on the bottle.

Enter Irina, Vershinin and Tusenbach; Tusenbach is wearing a new fashionable civilian suit

IRINA. Let's have a rest. No one will come in here.

VERSHININ. If it hadn't been for the soldiers the whole town would have burnt down. They were splendid! (*Rubs his hands with satisfaction.*) Absolutely splendid! What a fine lot they are!

KULYGIN (*comes up to them*). What's the time, everybody?

TUSENBACH. It's past three already. It's beginning to get light.

IRINA. Everyone's sitting in the hall. Nobody wants to go away. That Solyony of yours is there too. (*To Chebutykin.*) You ought to go to bed, Doctor.

CHEBUTYKIN. Thanking you kindly, Ma'am, but I'm perfectly alright. (*Combs his beard.*)

KULYGIN (*laughs*). You're drunk as a newt, Doctor! (*Slaps him on the back.*) Well done! *In vino veritas*, as the Romans said.

TUSENBACH. I've been asked to organise a concert in aid of the homeless.

IRINA. But who would. . . .

TUSENBACH. We could organise one if we really wanted to. Masha plays the piano beautifully.

KULYGIN. Yes, beautifully.

IRINA. She's out of practice. She hasn't played for three years . . . or is it four?

TUSENBACH. No one in this town has the faintest idea about music, no one at all, except me, and I tell you straight that Masha plays beautifully, almost professionally.

KULYGIN. You're right, Baron. I love Masha very much. She's a wonderful woman.

TUSENBACH. Just imagine being able to play so well and knowing that nobody, nobody at all, can appreciate it.

KULYGIN (*sighs*). Yes. But would it be quite proper for her to take part in a concert? (*Pause.*) I just don't know, perhaps it would be a good thing. Still I must confess that our headmaster, although he's an extremely upright and clever man, does have some rather strict ideas. . . . It's nothing to do with him, of course, but all the same I think I'll have a word with him, if you don't mind.

Chebutykin picks up the china clock and examines it

VERSHININ. I got very dirty at the fire. Look like nothing on earth. (*Pause.*) I heard something yesterday about our brigade being transferred a long way away. Some people think it may be Poland, others say Eastern Siberia.

TUSENBACH. I heard that too. The town will be completely deserted.

IRINA. We'll be leaving as well.

CHEBUTYKIN (*drops the clock which breaks*). Smashed to smithereens!

Pause; everyone is upset and embarrassed

KULYGIN (*picking up the pieces*). Fancy breaking such a precious object. Oh, Doctor! Doctor! Nought minus for conduct.

IRINA. That was Mother's clock.

CHEBUTYKIN. Maybe it was. So what? Perhaps I didn't break it, and it only seems that I did. Perhaps we don't really exist at all, and it only seems to us that we do. I don't know anything. Nobody knows anything. (*By the door.*) Why are you looking at me like that? Natasha's having an affair with Protopopov and you don't notice it. You just sit here not noticing anything, while Natasha's having an affair with Protopopov. (*Sings.*) "Won't you take this little date from me?" (*Goes out.*)

VERSHININ. Well, well. (*Laughs.*) How strange it all is. (*Pause.*) When the fire started I hurried home as fast as I could. As I got near the house I saw that it was still safe and sound, but my two daughters were standing at the front door in their nightdresses. Their mother was nowhere to be seen. People, horses and dogs were rushing about in a panic, and on my daughters' faces there was alarm, horror, entreaty, and I don't know what. My heart bled at the sight of those faces. Dear Lord, I thought, what other dreadful things are in store for these girls in their long lives. I snatched them up and began running. All the time I was thinking of what they would have to suffer in this world. (*Fire alarm; pause.*) I arrived here and was met by their mother, shouting and angry.

Enter Masha with a pillow and sits down on the ottoman

VERSHININ. And when I saw my daughters standing by the door in their nightclothes, and the street red from the fire, and the terrible commotion, I thought it must have been like this many years ago when the enemy suddenly invaded us, looting and burning. Yet what a difference there is between now and then! And in a short time from now, two or three hundred years, say, people will look back on our life today with horror and contempt, and everything about it will seem awkward and clumsy, inconvenient and strange. Oh, how wonderful life will be then! (*Laughs.*) Forgive me, I've started philosophising

again. But please let me go on. I do so want to talk. I feel in the mood for it. (*Pause.*) Everyone seems to be asleep. Well, as I was saying, it will be a wonderful life. All we can do is try to imagine it. There are only three people like you in this town now, but in generations to come there will be more and more. And the time will come when everything will change in the way you would like it to, then you will grow old too and people will be born who are better than you. (*Laughs.*) I'm in a rather special mood today. Got a tremendous urge to enjoy life. (*Sings.*) "To love all ages are in thrall, her impulses are good for all. . . ." (*Laughs.*)

MASHA. Trum-tum-tum!

VERSHININ. Tum-tum!

MASHA. Tra-ra-ra!

VERSHININ. Tra-ta-ta! (*Laughs.*)

Enter Fedotik

FEDOTIK (*dances*). It's burnt down! It's burnt down. Right down to the ground! (*Laughter.*)

IRINA. Has it really? Down to the ground?

FEDOTIK (*laughs*). Yes. Nothing left at all. My guitar, and the camera, and my letters—they've all gone. I wanted to give you a notebook, but that's gone too.

Enter Solyony

IRINA. Please go away. You can't come in here.

SOLYONY. Why is it alright for the Baron and not for me?

VERSHININ. We really must be going. What about the fire?

SOLYONY. They say it's dying down. I really would like to know why it's alright for the Baron and not for me. (*Takes out a bottle of perfume and sprinkles himself with it.*)

VERSHININ. Trum-tum-tum!

MASHA. Trum-tum!

VERSHININ (*laughs, to Solyony*). Let's go into the hall.

SOLYONY. Very well. We'll make a note of that. "My meaning I could make more clear, but that might tease

the geese, I fear." (*Glancing at Tusenbach.*) Cluck, cluck, cluck. (*Goes out with Vershinin and Fedotik.*)

IRINA. That Solyony has filled the room with smoke. (*Bewildered.*) The Baron's asleep. Baron! Baron!

TUSENBACH (*walking up*). Goodness, I'm tired. A brickkiln. I'm not talking nonsense. I'm starting work at a brickkiln soon, really I am. I've fixed it up already. (*To Irina, tenderly.*) You're so pale, so lovely, so charming. Your pallor seems to brighten the dark air like a beam of moonlight. You're sad, dissatisfied with life. Come away with me. Let's go and work together.

MASHA. Please go away, Baron.

TUSENBACH (*laughing*). So you're here? I can't see you. (*Kisses Irina's hand.*) Good-bye. I am going now. Looking at you now I can't help remembering how gay and cheerful you were once, a long time ago, on your birthday, talking about the joys of work. And how I dreamed of a happy life. But where is it? (*Kisses her hand.*) There are tears in your eyes. Go to bed. It's already getting light. It's nearly morning. If only I might give my life for you!

MASHA. Please go away, Baron. What are you thinking of. . . .

TUSENBACH. I'm going. (*Goes out.*)

MASHA (*lying down*). Are you asleep, Fyodor?

KULYGIN. What's that?

MASHA. Why don't you go home?

KULYGIN. Sweet Masha, darling Masha.

IRINA. She's worn out. Do let her have a rest.

KULYGIN. I'm just going. My wife is a good, fine woman. I love you, my one and only.

MASHA (*angrily*). Amo, amas, amat, amamus, amatis, amant.

KULYGIN (*laughs*). She's wonderful, isn't she? We got married seven years ago, but it seems like yesterday. Honestly. You really are a wonderful woman, you know. I'm content, content, content!

MASHA. And I'm bored, bored, bored. (*Sits up.*) I just can't get it out of my head. It's disgraceful. It keeps preying on my mind. I must say something about it. I mean Andrei. . . . He's mortgaged the house and his wife has



pocketed all the money. But the house belongs to the four of us, not just him. He must know that if he's got an ounce of decency.

KULYGIN. Why raise the subject, Masha! What does it matter to you? Andrei is up to his neck in debt. Forget about it.

MASHA. It's disgraceful, all the same. (*Lies down.*)

KULYGIN. You and I aren't poor. I teach at the school and give private lessons. I'm a plain honest man. *Omnia mea mecum porto*,\* as they say.

MASHA. I don't want anything, but I can't stand injustice. (*Pause.*) Go home, Fyodor.

KULYGIN (*kisses her*). You're tired. Lie down for half an hour. I'll sit and wait for you downstairs. Have a little sleep. (*Going.*) I'm content, content, content. (*Goes out.*)

IRINA. It's true. How petty Andrei has become, how stale and old he's grown with that woman. At one time he was talking about becoming a professor, but yesterday he boasted about finally being made a member of the Local Council. He's a member and Protopopov is the chairman. The whole town's talking and laughing about it, and he's the only one who doesn't know or see anything. Everyone went out to help with the fire, but he's sitting in his room not taking the slightest interest. Just playing the violin. (*Nervily.*) It's awful. Simply awful. (*Cries.*) I can't stand it. I can't stand it anymore! I really can't.

Olga comes in and tidies up her table

IRINA (*sobbing loudly*). Throw me out! Throw me out! I can't stand it anymore.

OLGA (*alarmed*). What's the matter? What is it, my dear?

IRINA (*sobbing*). Where has it all gone? Where? Oh, God! I've forgotten everything. Everything is all mixed up in my head. I can't remember the Italian for "window" or "ceiling". I'm forgetting everything. Each day I forget something else, and life is passing by and it will never return. And we'll never go to Moscow. I know we won't.

OLGA. There, there, my dear!

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\* All that I have I carry with me.

IRINA (*restraining herself*). I'm so unhappy. I can't work. I won't work. I've had enough. First I worked at the telegraph office and now I've got a job at the Local Council, and I hate and despise everything I am given to do. I'm twenty-three, I've been working for a long time, my brain has dried up, I've got thin, old and stupid, and there's nothing, nothing, no satisfaction! Time is passing and I seem to be moving away from the real, beautiful life, moving further and further away into a kind of chasm. I'm in complete despair, and how I'm still alive, how I haven't killed myself yet, I don't understand.

OLGA. Don't cry, my sweet, don't cry. It hurts me so.

IRINA. I'm not crying. I won't cry. That's enough. See, I'm not crying any more. That's enough.

OLGA. I'm speaking to you as a sister, as a friend, my dear. If you want my advice, you should marry the Baron.

Irina weeps softly

OLGA. You do respect him, think highly of him, don't you? I know he's not good-looking, but he's such a decent, good person. Women don't get married for love. It's their duty. That's my opinion, at least, and I would marry without love. I would marry anyone who asked me, so long as he was a good person. Even an old man.

IRINA. I kept waiting for us to move to Moscow. I thought I would meet the right person there. I dreamt about him, loved him. But it all turned out to be nonsense.

OLGA (*embraces her sister*). I understand everything, my sweet. When the Baron resigned from the army and came to see us in his civilian clothes, he looked so unattractive that I actually burst into tears. He asked me why I was crying, but I could hardly tell him. Yet if you were to marry him I should be so happy. That's quite a different matter.

Natasha walks across the stage in silence with a candle from the door right to the door left

MASHA (*sits up*). The way she walks you would think she had set fire to the town herself.

OLGA. You're so silly, Masha. The silliest one in the family, that's you. Forgive me for saying so. (*Pause.*)

MASHA. I want to confess to you, my dear sisters. My heart is heavy. I'll confess to you and never say a word to anyone else ever. I'll tell you now. (*Softly.*) It's my secret, but you must know. I can't keep it to myself. (*Pause.*) I'm in love. I'm in love with that man. You saw him just now. Well, why not say it outright. I'm in love with Colonel Vershinin.

OLGA (*goes behind her screen*). Stop it. I'm not listening anyway.

MASHA. There's nothing I can do about it. (*Clasps her head.*) At first I thought he was strange, then I felt sorry for him . . . then I fell in love with him. Fell in love with his voice, his words, his troubles, his two daughters. . . .

OLGA (*behind the screen*). I'm not listening anyway. Say any foolish things you like, but I'm not listening.

MASHA. Oh, you're the foolish one, Olga. I'm in love. It's fate. It's the way things had to be. And he loves me too. It's terrible, isn't it? It's wrong, isn't it? (*She takes Irina's hand and draws her closer.*) Oh, my dear. How are we to live? What is to become of us? When you read a love story it all seems so old-fashioned, so obvious, but when you fall in love yourself you realise that nobody knows anything and that each of us must decide for himself. Oh, my dear, dear sisters. I've confessed to you, and now I shall be silent. Like Gogol's madman . . . silence . . . silence.

Enter Andrei, followed by Ferapont

ANDREI (*angrily*). What do you want? I don't understand.

FERAPONT (*standing in the doorway, impatiently*). I've told you half a dozen times, Master Andrei.

ANDREI. In the first place, I'm "Sir" and not Master Andrei.

FERAPONT. The firemen want permission to drive straight down to the river through your orchard, Sir. It's a devil of a job going round the long way.

ANDREI. All right. Tell them they may. (*Ferapont goes out.*) I'm fed up with them. Where's Olga? (*Olga comes out from behind the screen.*) It's you I came to see.

Can you give me the key of the cupboard. I've lost mine. You know, that very tiny one.

Olga gives him the key in silence; Irina goes behind her screen; pause

ANDREI. What a fire! It's dying down now. Ferapont annoyed me, damn it, and I said something silly to him. Sir. Indeed. (*Pause.*) Why are you so silent, Olga? (*Pause.*) It's time we dropped all this nonsense and stopped sulking for no reason at all. Masha's here, so is Irina. Fine. We can have it out once and for all. What have you got against me? Eh?

OLGA. Stop it, Andrei. We'll talk about it tomorrow. (*Agitatedly.*) What an awful night!

ANDREI (*very embarrassed*). Don't get upset. I'm asking you quite calmly: what have you got against me? Tell me straight.

VERSHININ'S VOICE. Trum-tum-tum!

MASHA (*gets up, loudly*). Tra-ta-ta! (*To Olga.*) Good-bye, Olga, God bless. (*Goes behind the screen and kisses Irina.*) Sweet dreams. Good-bye, Andrei. Go away. They're worn out. You can have your talk tomorrow. (*Goes out.*)

OLGA. Yes, do let's put it off until tomorrow, Andrei. (*Goes behind her screen.*) It's time we were all in bed.

ANDREI. I'll just say what I have to say, then go. First of all, you've got something against Natasha, my wife. I've noticed it ever since the day we got married. Natasha is a fine, honest woman, decent and upright. I love and respect my wife, do you understand? I respect her and demand that others respect her too. I repeat, she is an honest, decent person, and all your objections to her are just sheer caprice, pardon me. (*Pause.*) Secondly, you seem to be annoyed that I'm not a professor and not engaged in academic work. But I do serve on the Local Council. I'm a member of the Council and to my mind that is as noble and worthy as serving science. I'm a member of the Council and proud of it, if you want to know. . . . (*Pause.*) Thirdly . . . I have something else to say . . . I mortgaged the house without asking your permission. I shouldn't have done that, I know, and I ask you to forgive me. I was driven to it by debts—thirty-five thousand. I don't play cards anymore, gave it up a long time ago, but the main

thing I can say to justify myself is that you girls get Father's pension, whereas I had nothing, no income, that is. . . . (*Pause.*)

KULYGIN (*at the door*). Masha's not here? (*Anxiously.*) Where can she be? That's strange. . . . (*Goes out.*)

ANDREI. They're not listening. Natasha is a fine, honest woman. (*Paces the stage in silence, then stops.*) When I got married I thought we would be happy . . . all of us. But, my God! (*Weeps.*) My dear sisters, my darling sisters, don't believe me, don't believe a word I say. . . . (*Goes out.*)

KULYGIN (*at the door, anxiously*). Where is Masha? She's not here? That's funny. (*Goes out.*)

Fire alarm, the stage is empty

IRINA (*behind her screen*). Olga! Who's that knocking on the floor downstairs?

OLGA. It's the doctor. He's drunk.

IRINA. What a disturbing night! (*Pause.*) Olga! (*Looks round the screen.*) Did you hear? The brigade's going away, they're transferring it to somewhere far away.

OLGA. That's only a rumour.

IRINA. We'll be left here all on our own. Olga!

OLGA. What is it?

IRINA. I respect the Baron and think very highly of him. He's a fine person. I will marry him. I agree. But let's go to Moscow. Let's go, please. There's nowhere better than Moscow in the whole world. Please let's go, Olga!

*Curtain*

## ACT FOUR

The grounds of the Prozorovs' house. A long avenue of firs leading to the river. The opposite bank is forested. Right is the terrace of the house with a table on which there are bottles and glasses. People have obviously just been drinking champagne. It is noon. Now and then people walk through the garden on their way from the street to the river. Five soldiers march past quickly.

Chelostykin in an amiable mood, which does not desert him throughout the act, is sitting in an armchair waiting to be summoned. He

is wearing an army cap and carrying a stick. Irina, Kulygin with a medal round his neck and no moustache, and Tusenbach are standing on the terrace saying good-bye to Fedotik and Rodé who are walking down the steps. Both officers are in field dress

TUSENBACH (*embraces Fedotik*). You're such a nice person. We had such good times together. (*Embraces Rodé.*) Let me embrace you again. Good-bye, my dear friend.

IRINA. Au revoir!

FEDOTIK. It's good-bye, not au revoir. We shall never meet again.

KULYGIN. Who knows! (*Wipes his eyes and smiles.*) Look at me—crying too.

IRINA. We'll meet again one day.

FEDOTIK. In ten or fifteen years? But then we'll hardly recognise one another. We'll just exchange a polite hello. (*Takes a photograph.*) Stand still, please! Just one more.

RODÉ (*embraces Tusenbach*). We shall never meet again. (*Kisses Irina's hand.*) Thank you for everything, everything.

FEDOTIK (*irritatedly*). Oh, do stand still!

TUSENBACH. God willing, we shall meet again. But write to us. Be sure to write.

RODÉ (*looking round at the garden*). Good-bye, trees! (*Shouts.*) Hup! Hup! (*Pause.*) Farewell, echo!

KULYGIN. Who knows, you may get married there in Poland. Your Polish wife will embrace you and say "Kochane". (*Laughs.*)

FEDOTIK (*looking at his watch*). We've less than an hour left. Solyony is the only one from our battery who is going on the barge. We're with the infantry unit. Three divisional batteries are leaving today and another three tomorrow. Then there'll be peace and quiet in the town.

TUSENBACH. And deadly boredom.

RODÉ. Where is Mrs Kulygin?

KULYGIN. She's in the garden.

FEDOTIK. I'd like to say good-bye to her.

RODÉ. Good-bye, everybody. We must go, or I'll start crying too. (*Quickly embraces Tusenbach and Kulygin, kisses Irina's hand.*) We've enjoyed living here so much.

FEDOTIK (*to Kulygin*). Here's a little keepsake for you . . . a notebook and pencil. We'll go down this way to the river. (*They walk off, both looking back from time to time.*)

RODÉ (*shouting*). Hup! Hup!

KULYGIN (*shouting*). Good-bye!

In the background Fedotik and Rodé meet Masha and say good-bye to her; she walks along with them

IRINA. They've gone. (*Sits down on the bottom step of the terrace.*)

CHEBUTYKIN. And they forgot to say good-bye to me.

IRINA. Well, why didn't you?

CHEBUTYKIN. I forgot too. Still, I'll be seeing them again soon. I'm leaving tomorrow. Yes. One more day to go. In a year from now they'll retire me and I'll come back here and live out the rest of my days near you. Only one year to go before I get my pension. (*Puts his newspaper into his pocket and takes out another one.*) I'll come back to you and turn over a completely new leaf. I'll be quiet and . . . and docile . . . and well-behaved.

IRINA. Yes, it's time you turned over a new leaf, Doctor. You really should.

CHEBUTYKIN. Yes. I know. (*Sings quietly.*) Ta-ra-ra boom-di-ay! I'm in the soup today!

KULYGIN. You're incorrigible, Doctor. Quite incorrigible.

CHEBUTYKIN. I should have you as a teacher. Then I'd soon be corrected.

IRINA. Fyodor has shaved off his moustache. I can't bear to look at him.

KULYGIN. Why?

CHEBUTYKIN. I could say, what you look like. But I daren't.

KULYGIN. So what. That's the custom nowadays, the *modus vivendi*. Our headmaster has shaved his moustache off, and when I became second master I shaved mine off as well. Nobody likes it, but I don't care. I am content. With or without a moustache, I am content. (*Sits down.*)

In the background Andrei is pushing a pram with a sleeping child

IRINA. Dear Doctor, I'm terribly worried. You were out on the boulevard yesterday. Please tell me what happened there.

CHEBUTYKIN. What happened? Oh, it was nothing. Nothing at all. (*Reads the newspaper.*) It makes no difference.

KULYGIN. They say that Solyony and the Baron met on the boulevard yesterday outside the theatre....

TUSENBACH. Oh, do stop that. Really. (*Waves his hand and goes into the house.*)

KULYGIN. ...outside the theatre. Solyony began picking a quarrel with the Baron, who lost his temper and said something offensive.

CHEBUTYKIN. I don't know. It's all nonsense.

KULYGIN. I remember a teacher writing "nonsense" in Russian on a seminary student's essay, and the student read it out as "renyxa" thinking it was in Roman letters. (*Laughs.*) Isn't that amusing! They say Solyony is in love with Irina and that he hates the Baron. That's understandable enough. Irina is a very pretty young lady. She's even rather like Masha, thoughtful like Masha. But you have a sweeter nature, Irina. Although Masha is very sweet-natured, as well. I love Masha.

Off-stage, from the garden: "Halloo! Hup! Hup!"

IRINA (*starts*). I seem to be frightened by everything today. (*Pause.*) It's all ready. I'm going to send off my luggage after lunch. The Baron and I are getting married tomorrow and leaving straight after the wedding for the brickkiln. The next day I shall be teaching in a school. We'll begin our new life. With God's help. When I passed the teacher's exam I actually wept with joy, with delight. (*Pause.*) They'll be coming to take the luggage to the station soon.

KULYGIN. That's as may be, but somehow it doesn't sound serious. Just a lot of ideas, not much that is really serious. Still I wish you all the best from the bottom of my heart.

CHEBUTYKIN (*with much feeling*). My dear, sweet girl. My angel. You've gone so far ahead, there's no catching you up. And I am limping along behind like a



migrant bird who has grown too old to fly any more. But you fly away, my darlings, fly away, and God bless you. (*Pause.*) You shouldn't have shaved off your moustache, Kulygin.

KULYGIN. Oh, do stop it! (*Sighs.*) The soldiers are going today and everything will return to normal again. Whatever people may say, Masha is a good, honest woman. I love her very much and I am happy with my lot. How differently life treats people. There's a man called Kozyrev who works in the local excise office. We went to school together, but he was expelled from the fifth form because he could not master the intricacies of the *ut consecutivum*. He's terribly hard up now and in poor health. Whenever we meet I say "How are you, *ut consecutivum*?" "Yes, indeed," he replies, "that's just it, *consecutivum*", and starts coughing. But I've been lucky all my life. I'm a happy man. I've even got the order of Stanislav, second class, and now I am teaching others the *ut consecutivum*. I'm intelligent, of course, more intelligent than a good many people, but that's not what makes you happy....

*The Maiden's Prayer* is being played inside on the piano

IRINA. Tomorrow evening I won't have to listen to *The Maiden's Prayer* or see Protopopov. (*Pause.*) Protopopov's sitting in the drawing-room. He's there again today.

KULYGIN. Has our headmistress arrived yet?

IRINA. No. Someone's gone to fetch her. If you only knew how hard it is living here alone, without Olga. She lives up at the school now. She's headmistress, with plenty to do all day, but I'm all alone, with time on my hands, and I hate the room I live in. So I decided that if I was fated not to go to Moscow, that was that. I would resign myself to it. As the good Lord wills. Then the Baron proposed to me. I thought it over and accepted him. He's a good man, an incredibly good man. And I suddenly felt as if my heart had grown wings. My spirits soared and back came the old longing to work. But something happened yesterday, some secret threat is hanging over me.

CHEBUTYKIN. Renyxa! Nonsense!

NATASHA (*through the window*). The headmistress is here!

KULYGIN. The headmistress has arrived. Let's go in.

Goes into the house with Irina

CHEBUTYKIN (*reads the paper and sings quietly*). Ta-ra-ra-boom-di-ay. I'm in the soup today.

Masha approaches; Andrei is wheeling the pram in the background

MASHA. There he sits, not a care in the world.

CHEBUTYKIN. And why not?

MASHA (*sits down*). Oh, nothing. (*Pause*.) Did you love my mother?

CHEBUTYKIN. Very much.

MASHA. And did she love you?

CHEBUTYKIN (*after a pause*). That I don't remember.

MASHA. Is my man here? That's what our cook Marfa used to call her policeman. "My man." Is my man here?

CHEBUTYKIN. No, not yet.

MASHA. When you snatch your happiness in little pieces and then suddenly lose it, like I have, you find yourself gradually getting coarse and shrewish. (*Pointing at her breast*.) I can feel the bitterness inside me. (*Looking at Andrei who is wheeling the pram*.) There's old Andrei, our dear brother. All our hopes have come to nought. It took thousands of people to raise the bell and much money and labour was spent on it, then it suddenly fell and broke into pieces. And so did Andrei.

ANDREI. When are we going to get some peace and quiet in this house? It's so noisy.

CHEBUTYKIN. Soon. (*Looks at his watch*.) I've got an old watch. It chimes the hour. (*Winds it and it chimes*.) The first, second and fifth batteries are leaving at one o'clock sharp. (*Pause*.) And I'm going tomorrow.

ANDREI. Forever?

CHEBUTYKIN. I don't know. Perhaps I'll come back next year. Although goodness only knows. It makes no difference.

The sound of a harp and violin being played in the distance

ANDREI. The town will be empty. As if it had been snuffed out. (*Pause.*) Something happened yesterday outside the theatre. Everyone's talking about it, but I don't know what it was.

CHEBUTYKIN. It was nothing. Solyony started picking a quarrel with the Baron who got into a temper and insulted him. In the end Solyony had to challenge him to a duel. (*Looks at his watch.*) It's about time now. . . . Half past twelve in the grove, the one you can see on the other side of the river. Bang-bang! (*Laughs.*) Solyony thinks he's Lermontov. Even writes poetry. But joking apart, this is his third duel.

MASHA. Whose?

CHEBUTYKIN. Solyony's.

MASHA. And what about the Baron?

CHEBUTYKIN. What about the Baron? (*Pause.*)

MASHA. My head's going round. . . . You shouldn't allow it, you know. He might wound the Baron or even kill him.

CHEBUTYKIN. The Baron's a nice, but one baron more or less doesn't make much difference, does it? Let them duel. What does it matter! (*Shouts of "Halloo! Hup! Hup!" from outside the garden.*) You can wait. That's Skvortsov, one of the seconds. He's waiting in the boat. (*Pause.*)

ANDREI. I think taking part in a duel or even being present at one as a doctor is quite immoral.

CHEBUTYKIN. It only seems so. In fact, we're not here, nothing is here, we don't exist, it just seems as though we do. And what difference does it make, anyway?

MASHA. They talk and talk all day long. (*Walking away.*) You live in a climate where it might start snowing at any minute, and they have to talk this as well. (*Stops.*) I'm not going into the house. I can't go in there. Tell me when Colonel Vershinin comes. (*Walks off down the avenue.*) The birds are already migrating. (*Looks up.*) Swans or geese. Lucky things. (*Goes off.*)

ANDREI. There will be no one left in the house. The officers are leaving, you are going and my sister is getting married. I shall be left on my own.

CHEBUTYKIN. What about your wife?

Ferapont comes in with some papers

ANDREI. A wife's a wife. She's an honest, decent woman, well, a kind woman, but still there's something about her that reduces her to the level of a mean, blind animal, something rough to the touch. In any case she isn't a human being. I'm telling you this as my friend, as the only person in whom I can confide. I love Natasha, that's true, but at times she seems incredibly vulgar and then I feel lost. I don't understand why I love her so much, or did love her.

CHEBUTYKIN (*getting up*). I'm going away tomorrow, my lad, and we may never meet again. My advice to you is this. Put on your hat, pick up your stick, and get out. Start walking and don't look back. And the farther you go, the better.

Solyony walks past in the background with two officers; seeing Chebutykin, he turns towards him; the officers walk on

SOLYONY. It's time, Doctor. Half past twelve. (*Greets Andrei.*)

CHEBUTYKIN. I'm just coming. I'm sick and tired of the lot of you. (*To Andrei.*) If anyone asks for me, Andrei, tell them I'll be back in a minute. (*Sighs.*) Dear, oh dear!

SOLYONY. "He scarce had time to catch his breath, before the bear was hugging him to death!" (*Walks along with him.*) Why are you wheezing, old man?

CHEBUTYKIN. So what?

SOLYONY. Feeling all right?

CHEBUTYKIN (*angrily*). Fit as a fiddle.

SOLYONY. No need to worry, old man. I shan't go too far. Just wing him like a woodcock. (*Takes out some perfume and sprinkles it over his hands.*) I've used up a whole flask today and they still smell—like a corpse. (*Pause.*) Yes. "And he, the rebel, seeks the storm, as though the storm will bring him peace."

CHEBUTYKIN. Yes. "He scarce had time to catch his breath, before the bear was hugging him to death!" (*Goes off with Solyony.*)

Shouts of "Hup! Halloo!" Enter Andrei and Ferapont

FERAPONT. Papers to sign, Sir. . . .

ANDREI (*irritably*). Oh, do leave me alone! Please!  
(*Goes off with the pram.*)

FERAPONT. But that's what papers are for—to be signed. (*Retires into the background.*)

Enter Irina and Tusenbach in a straw hat. Kulygin walks across the stage calling "Masha! Where are you?"

TUSENBACH. I think he's the only person in the town who is glad that the regiment is leaving.

IRINA. You can see why. (*Pause.*) The place will be deserted.

TUSENBACH. I'll be back in a minute, darling.

IRINA. Where are you going?

TUSENBACH. I've got to go into town and then . . . see off some friends.

IRINA. That's not true. Why are you so preoccupied today, Nicholas? (*Pause.*) What happened outside the theatre yesterday?

TUSENBACH (*with an impatient gesture*). I shall be back and with you again in an hour. (*Kisses her hands.*) My sweet darling. (*Looks into her eyes.*) It's five years since I fell in love with you, and I still can't get used to it. You seem more and more beautiful to me. That wonderful hair. Those lovely eyes! I shall take you away tomorrow and we will work. We shall be rich. My dreams will come true. You will be happy. But there's only one thing: you don't love me.

IRINA. That's not within my power. I will be your wife, and I shall be true to you and obey you, but I don't love you. I can't help it. (*Weeps.*) I've never been in love. Oh, how I've dreamed of love, dreamed of it for years on end, night and day, but my heart is like piano that is locked and the key is lost. (*Pause.*) You look worried.

TUSENBACH. I didn't sleep last night. There's nothing in my life that frightens me. The only thing that torments me and keeps me from sleeping is that lost key. Say something to me. (*Pause.*) Say something.

IRINA. What? What can I say? What?

TUSENBACH. Anything.

IRINA. That's enough. That's enough. (*Pause.*)

TUSENBACH. It's strange how the merest trifles sometimes become important in our lives, quite suddenly, without any rhyme or reason. You go on laughing at them and thinking of them as rubbish, yet all the same you realise that there is no turning back. But let's not talk about that. I feel quite gay. It's as if I were seeing those firs, maples and birch trees for the first time, and they were all looking at me curiously and waiting. How beautiful those trees are and how beautiful the life around them should be, when you come to think about it. (*Shouts of "Halloo! Hup! Hup!"*) I must go. It's time. That tree over there has died, but it's still swaying in the wind with the others. And I can't help feeling that if I were to die, I'd still go on taking part in life one way or another. Good-bye, my sweet. (*Kisses her hands.*) The papers you gave me are on my desk under the calendar.

IRINA. I'll come with you.

TUSENBACH (*uneasily*). No, no! (*Walks away quickly and stops in the avenue.*) Irina!

IRINA. Yes?

TUSENBACH (*not knowing what to say*). I haven't had my coffee today. Ask them to make me some, will you? (*Goes off quickly.*)

Irina stands lost in thought, then retires into the background and sits on a swing. Enter Andrei with the pram, followed by Ferapont

FERAPONT. They're not my papers, you know, Sir. They're official ones. I didn't make them up.

ANDREI. Oh, where has it gone, my past? When I was young, gay and clever, when my dreams and thoughts were noble ones, when my present and future were bright with hope? Why is it that before we've hardly begun to live, we become dull, drab, uninteresting, lazy, indifferent, useless and unhappy? This town is two hundred years old and it has a hundred thousand inhabitants, yet not one of them is at all different from the others. Not one great man—now or in the past—not one scientist or artist, not one person who stands out even slightly and who could arouse envy or the passionate urge to imitate him. All they do is eat, drink, sleep and then die. Others are born

and they too eat, drink, sleep and bring a little variety into their lives to relieve the deadly tedium with vicious gossip, drink, cards, or taking one another to court. The wives deceive the husbands, and the husbands lie and pretend they don't see or hear anything, and their incredibly vulgar influence has so crushing an effect on the children that the divine spark in them is extinguished, and they become wretched, lifeless creatures as similar to one another as their fathers and mothers. (*To Ferapont, angrily.*) What do you want?

FERAPONT. The papers have got to be signed.

ANDREI. I'm sick and tired of you.

FERAPONT (*handing him the papers*). The cloakroom attendant at the town hall said the temperature dropped to two hundred below freezing in St. Petersburg.

ANDREI. The present is hateful, but when I think about the future my heart leaps. The worry and constriction disappear. There is a glimmering of light in the distance, and I can see freedom, I can see myself and my children becoming free from idleness, from *kvass*, from goose with stewed cabbage, from after-dinner naps, from loafing our lives away.

FERAPONT. They say two thousand people died of the cold. Everybody was in a real panic. Can't remember whether it was in Petersburg or Moscow.

ANDREI (*overcome with tenderness*). My dear sisters! My darling sisters! (*Through tears.*) Masha, my dear.

NATASHA (*through the window*). Who's that talking so loudly? Is it you, Andrei? You'll wake Sophie up. Il ne faut pas faire du bruit, la Sophie est dormée déjà. Vous êtes un ours. (*Getting angry.*) If you want to talk, give the pram to someone else. Ferapont, take the pram from the master!

FERAPONT. Yes, Ma'am. (*Takes the pram.*)

ANDREI (*disconcerted*). But I wasn't talking very loudly.

NATASHA (*fondling her son by the window*). Bobbikins! You naughty boy! You little scamp!

ANDREI (*looking at the papers*). Right. I'll look them over and sign what's necessary, then you can take them back to the Board.

Goes into the house reading the papers. Ferapont wheels the pram into the background

NATASHA (*by the window*). What's your mummy's name, Bobbikins? You clever boy! And who's that? That's your Aunt Olga. Say "Hello, Aunt Olga!"

Some wandering musicians, a man and a girl, come up and start playing the violin and the harp. Vershinin, Olga and Anfissa come out of the house and listen for a moment in silence. Irina goes up to them

OLGA. Our garden's like a public thoroughfare, what with everybody walking and driving through it. Give the musicians something, Nanny.

ANFISSA (*gives the musicians some money*). And God bless you, my dears. (*The musicians bow their thanks and go off.*) Ee, but they're miserable folk. You don't play on a full stomach. (*To Irina.*) Hello, my love. (*Kisses her.*) You should see me now, my little lass. Living up there at the school with Olga. The good Lord's provided for me in my old age. Never lived so well in all my life. It's a big flat, and I have my own little room and a bed. All belongs to the school. I wake up of a night and—glory be, if I'm not the happiest soul alive.

VERSHININ (*looking at his watch*). We're leaving soon, Olga. I must be going. (*Pause.*) I wish you all the very, very best. . . . Where is Masha?

IRINA. She's in the garden. I'll go and find her.

VERSHININ. Do please. I'm in a hurry.

ANFISSA. I'll go and look for her, too. (*Shouts.*) Masha! Where are you? (*Goes off with Irina into the garden.*) Masha!

VERSHININ. All good things come to an end. Here I am saying good-bye to you all. (*Looks at his watch.*) They gave us a sort of official lunch at the town hall. We had champagne and the big-wigs made speeches. I ate and listened, but in my heart I was here, with you. (*Looks round at the garden.*) I've got used to you all.

OLGA. Do you think we shall ever meet again?

VERSHININ. Probably not. (*Pause.*) My wife and two girls will be staying on here for a month or two. If any-



thing should happen or if they should need anything, would you. . . .

OLGA. Yes, yes, of course. Don't worry on that account. (*Pause.*) There won't be a single army man left in the town tomorrow. Everything will just be memories. And of course we'll be starting a new life. (*Pause.*) Things never turn out as we want. I didn't want to be headmistress, but now I am. So we won't be going to Moscow after all.

VERSHININ. Well. Thank you for everything. Forgive me, if things weren't quite as they should be. I did talk an awful lot—forgive me for that, too. And don't think badly of me.

OLGA (*wiping her eyes*). What's happened to Masha?

VERSHININ. What else shall I say to you before I go? What shall I philosophise about? (*Laughs.*) Life is hard. To many of us it seems bleak and void of hope, but all the same it is getting brighter and easier, and the time is probably not far off when it will shine forth in all its glory. (*Looks at his watch.*) I must be going. In the old days men waged wars. Their lives were taken up with campaigns, invasions and victories. Now all that has disappeared leaving an enormous gap which man has not yet learnt how to fill. But he is searching hard and is bound to find something. If only he would find it quickly! (*Pause.*) What we need is not only hard work, but education. Not only education, but hard work. (*Looks at his watch.*) I really must be going.

OLGA. Here she is.

Enter Masha

VERSHININ. I've come to say good-bye. (*Olga walks away a little so as not to interfere with their leave-taking.*)

MASHA (*gazing at his face*). Good-bye. (*A long kiss.*)

OLGA. That's enough.

Masha sobs bitterly

VERSHININ. Write to me. Don't forget! Let me go now—it's time. Olga, take her, please. I must go. I'm

late already. (*Deeply moved, he kisses Olga's hands, then embraces Masha once again and goes out quickly.*)

OLGA. There, there, Masha! That will do, my dear.

Enter Kulygin

KULYGIN (*embarrassed*). Never mind, never mind. Let her have a little cry. Good Masha! Nice Masha! You're my wife and I'm happy, whatever happens. I'm not complaining. I don't reproach you. Olga is my witness. We'll go on living as we used to, and I won't say a single word to you, or make the slightest hint. . . .

MASHA (*restraining her sobs*). A green oak by the curving shore, and on that oak a chain of gold. And on that oak a chain of gold . . . I'm going mad! A green oak . . . by the curving shore. . . .

OLGA. Calm down, Masha. Calm down. (*To Kulygin.*) Give her a drink of water.

MASHA. I'm not crying anymore.

KULYGIN: She's not crying anymore. She's a good girl.

The dull report of a distant shot is heard

MASHA. A green oak by the curving shore, and on that oak a chain of gold. Green cat . . . green oak . . . I'm getting muddled. (*Takes a drink of water.*) My life is ruined . . . I want nothing now. I'll be all right in a minute. What does it matter? What's a curving shore, anyway? Why can't I get it out of my head? My thoughts are all confused.

Enter Irina

OLGA. Calm down, Masha. There's a good girl. Let's go inside.

MASHA (*angrily*). I'm not going in there. (*Bursts into sobs, but stops immediately.*) I don't go in there now. I'm never going into that house again.

IRINA. Let's just sit down together and be quiet for a minute. I'm going away tomorrow, after all. . . . (*Pause.*)

KULYGIN. I confiscated this false beard and moustache from a boy in the third form yesterday. (*Puts on the false beard and moustache.*) I look like our German teacher, don't I? (*Laughs.*) Those boys are funny little devils.

MASHA. Yes, you do look like the German teacher.  
OLGA (*laughs*). So you do.

Masha starts crying

IRINA. Don't Masha.

KULYGIN. Very like him.

Enter Natasha

NATASHA (*to the maid*). What's that? Mr Protopopov will sit with little Sophie and the master can wheel Bobbikins in the pram. Children never give you a moment's rest. (*To Irina.*) Such a pity you're going tomorrow. Couldn't you stay on for another week? (*Screams as she catches sight of Kulygin, who laughs and takes off the mask.*) You naughty man! You gave me such a fright! (*To Irina.*) I've got so fond of you. It's not easy to say good-bye, you know. I've told them to put Andrei in your room—let him fiddle away in there. And we'll move little Sophie to his. She's such an angel! Such a pretty little girl. Today she looked at me with her big eyes and said "Mama"!

KULYGIN. Yes, she is a lovely child.

NATASHA. So tomorrow I shall be on my own here. (*Sighs.*) The first thing I'll do is have that avenue of firs cut down, then that maple.... It looks so ugly of an evening. (*To Irina.*) That belt doesn't suit you at all, dear. It's in rather bad taste. You should wear something brighter. I'll have nothing but flowers here, and they'll smell so lovely. (*Strictly.*) What's that fork doing on the bench? (*Walks off to the house, to the maid.*) I said, what's that fork doing on the bench? (*Screams.*) Hold your tongue!

KULYGIN. There she goes again.

A march is being played off-stage. They all listen

OLGA. They're leaving.

Enter Chebutykin

MASHA. Yes, they're leaving. Well, here's wishing them a safe journey. (*To her husband.*) We must go home. Where's my hat and cloak?

KULYGIN. I took them inside. I'll get them.

OLGA. Yes, now we can all go home. It's time.

CHEBUTYKIN. Just a moment, Olga.

OLGA. What? (*Pause.*) What is it?

CHEBUTYKIN. Nothing. . . . I don't know how to tell you. . . . (*Whispers in her ear.*)

OLGA (*horrified*). It's not true.

CHEBUTYKIN. Yes it is. An awful business. I'm worn out, exhausted. I don't want to talk about it. (*Irritatedly.*) It makes no difference anyway.

MASHA. What's happened?

OLGA (*putting her arms around Irina*). What a dreadful day! I don't know how to tell you, my dear.

IRINA. What's happened? Tell me quickly. Please! (*Starts crying.*)

CHEBUTYKIN. The Baron has just been killed in a duel.

IRINA (*weeping softly*). I knew it. I knew it.

CHEBUTYKIN (*sits down on a bench in the background.*) I'm worn out. (*Takes a newspaper out of his pocket.*) Let them have a good cry. (*Sings quietly.*) Tar-ra boom-di-ay. I'm in the soup today. What difference does it make?

The three sisters are standing with their arms round one another

MASHA. Oh, listen to the music. They're going away from us. One has already gone, gone forever. And we shall be left alone to start our lives anew. We must live. We must live.

IRINA (*lays her head on Olga's breast*). The time will come when there will be no more secrets, when the reason for all this suffering will be made clear. But till then we must live, we must work, nothing but work! Tomorrow I shall leave alone. I shall go and teach in a school, and devote my life to those who may need it. It

is autumn now. Winter will soon be here and everything will be covered with snow. But I shall be working, working.

OLGA (*embraces her two sisters*). The music is so gay and cheerful, I do so want to live. Oh, dear! Time will pass and we shall be gone forever. We shall be forgotten, and people will no longer remember our faces and voices. But our sufferings will turn into joy for those who live after us. There will be peace and happiness on earth, and we who live now will be remembered with gratitude and blessing. Oh, my dear sisters, our lives are not finished yet. We shall go on living! The music is so gay and cheerful. It seems that any minute now we shall find out why we are alive and why we are suffering. Oh, if only we knew! If only we knew!

The music is growing fainter and fainter; Kulygin comes in, happy and smiling, with Masha's hat and cloak; Andrei is wheeling Bobbikins in the pram

CHEBUTYKIN (*sings quietly*). Ta-ra-ra boom-di-ay. I'm in the soup today. (*Reads the newspaper.*) It makes no difference. No difference at all.

OLGA. If only we knew! If only we knew!

*Curtain*

# THE CHERRY ORCHARD\*

*A comedy in four acts*

## CHARACTERS

LYUBOV RANEVSKAYA, the owner of the cherry orchard  
ANYA, her daughter of seventeen  
VARYA, her adopted daughter of twenty-four  
LEONID GAYEV, her brother  
YERMOLAI LOPAKHIN, a merchant  
PYOTR TROFIMOV, a student  
SIMEONOV-PISHCHIK, a landowner  
CHARLOTTA, a governess  
SEMYON YEPIKHODOV, a clerk  
DUNYASHA, a maid  
FEERS, an old servant of eighty-seven  
YASHA, a young servant  
WAYFARER  
STATIONMASTER  
POST-OFFICE OFFICIAL  
GUESTS, SERVANTS

Scene: Ranevskaya's estate

## ACT ONE

A room, which is still called the nursery. One of the *doors* leads to Anya's room. Dawn, the sun will soon rise. It is already May, the cherry-trees are in blossom, but it is cold in the garden with the frost of early morning. The windows are closed.

Dunyasha, with a candle, and Lopakhin, with a book in his hand, come in

LOPAKHIN. So the train's in, thank Heaven. What time is it?

DUNYASHA. Nearly two. (*She puts out the candle.*) It is daylight already.

LOPAKHIN. How late is the train? A couple of hours at least. (*Yawning and stretching.*) I'm certainly a fine

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\* First printing 1956.

one! To have come on purpose to meet them at the station and then to go and doze off sitting in a chair. What a shame! Why didn't you wake me?

DUNYASHA. I thought you'd gone. (*She listens.*) There! That must be them driving up.

LOPAKHIN (*listening*). No; they've got to get the luggage out and all that. (*Pause.*) I wonder what Mme Ranevskaya has become like after those five years abroad. She's a splendid woman. So easy and simple in her ways. I remember when I was a youngster of fifteen my late father (he used to keep a shop here in the village then) hit me so hard in the nose it bled. We were in the yard here—I forget what we'd come about—and he had been drinking. I remember it like yesterday. Madame Ranevskaya, quite a young girl then, and oh, so slender, brought me to this very room—it was the nursery then—to wash my face. "Don't cry, little muzhik," she said, "it'll get well in time for your wedding." (*Pause.*) Little muzhik! . . . My father was a muzhik, sure enough, but here am I in a white waistcoat and brown boots, a silk purse out of a sow's ear, as you might say; I'm just rich, but for all my money, come to think of it, I'm still a regular muzhik. (*Turning over the pages of the book.*) I've been reading this book here and I didn't understand a word; I fell asleep over it. (*Pause.*)

DUNYASHA. The dogs didn't sleep at all last night, they felt their masters were coming.

LOPAKHIN. What's the matter with you, Dunyasha?

DUNYASHA. My hands are shaking. I'm going to faint.

LOPAKHIN. You are too delicate, Dunyasha, that's what's wrong with you. You dress like a young lady, and look at the way your hair's done up! That won't do. One must remember one's standing.

Yepikhodov comes in with a bunch of flowers. He wears a jacket and brightly polished top boots which squeak noisily. As he comes in he drops the flowers

YEPIKHODOV (*picking them up*). This is from the gardener; he says it is to go in the dining-room. (*He hands them to Dunyasha.*)



SHOTS FROM THE FILM OF *THE BEAR* (1938),  
DIRECTOR: ANNENSKY











SHOTS FROM THE FILM OF *THE ANNIVERSARY* (1944), DIRECTOR: PETROV  
Shipuchin (in foreground)—V. Y. Stanitsin





Merchutkina—A. P. Zuyeva  
Merchutkina—A. P. Zuyeva, Shipuchin—V. Y. Stanitsin



LOPAKHIN. And bring me some kvass.

DUNYASHA. Yes, sir. (*She goes out.*)

YEPIKHODOV. There's a frost this morning, three degrees below. But the cherry-trees are all in blossom. I can't say I think much of our climate. (*Sighing.*) No, I can't. Our climate is not adapted to contribute; and I should like to add, with your permission, that only two days ago I bought myself a new pair of boots, and I venture to assure you they squeak harder than I can stand. What am I to grease them with?

LOPAKHIN. Leave me alone! I'm fed up with you.

YEPIKHODOV. Every day some misfortune happens to me. But I don't complain. No, I'm used to it, and I keep smiling. (*Dunyasha comes in and hands a glass of kvass to Lopakhin.*) I must be going. (*He knocks against a chair, which falls over.*) There you are! (*With a triumphant air.*) You see, if you'll excuse me the expression, the sort of accident, by the way. It is simply remarkable! (*He goes out.*)

DUNYASHA. You know, Mr Lopakhin, Yepikhodov proposed to me.

LOPAKHIN. Oh!

DUNYASHA. I hardly know what to do. He is a well-behaved man all right, but sometimes, when he talks, you can't make out anything. It's all so nice and moving, but you just can't get at the meaning of it. I fancy I am rather fond of him. He loves me to distraction. He is a most unfortunate man—every day something unpleasant happens to him. So they've nicknamed him—Twenty-Two Misfortunes.

LOPAKHIN (*listening*). There! I think they're coming!

DUNYASHA. They're coming! Oh, what's the matter with me? I'm cold all over.

LOPAKHIN. Yes, there they come, and no mistake. Let's go and meet them. I wonder if she'll know me. It's five years since she last saw me.

DUNYASHA (*all in a flutter*). I am going to faint! I'll drop this very minute!

Two carriages are heard driving up to the house. Lopakhin and Dunyasha go out quickly, and the stage is left empty. There is a noise in the adjoining rooms. Feers hurriedly crosses the stage, lean-



for on a slender walking-stick. He has driven to meet Ranevskaya at the station. He is wearing an old-fashioned livery and a tall hat; he mumbles something to himself but it is impossible to make out a word. The noise behind the scenes grows louder. A voice: "Here, let's go this way."

Enter Ranevskaya, Anya, Charlotta with a little dog on a chain, all in travelling dresses; Varya in an overcoat with a shawl on her head, Gayev, Simeonov-Pishchik, Lopakhin, Dunyasha carrying a parcel and an umbrella, servants with luggage; all cross the stage

ANYA. Let's go this way. Do you remember what room this is, Mamma?

RANEVSKAYA (*joyfully, through her tears*). The nursery!

VARYA. How cold it is, my hands are quite numb. (*To Ranevskaya.*) Your rooms, the white room and the lavender one, are just as you left them, Mamma.

RANEVSKAYA. The nursery, my dear, beautiful nursery! Here is where I used to sleep when I was a little girl. (*Crying.*) And here I am, like a little girl again. . . . (*Kissing Gayev and Varya and then Gayev again.*) Varya has not changed a bit, she is as like a nun as ever. And I knew Dunyasha at once. (*She kisses Dunyasha.*)

GAYEV. Your train was two hours late. What do you think of that? There's punctuality for you!

CHARLOTTA (*to Simeonov-Pishchik*). My little dog even eats nuts.

PISHCHIK (*surprised*). Fancy that!

All but Anya and Dunyasha go out

DUNYASHA. At last you're back! (*She takes off Anya's hat and overcoat.*)

ANYA. I haven't slept for four nights on the journey. I feel dreadfully cold.

DUNYASHA. It was Lent when you went away. There was snow and it was freezing. But now—look! My darling! (*Laughing and kissing her.*) I have missed you so, my joy, my precious! Oh, I must tell you something at once. I can't wait another minute.

ANYA (*listlessly*). What now?

DUNYASHA. Yepikhodov, the clerk, proposed to me just after Easter.

ANYA. Same old story. (*Arranging her hair.*) I've lost

all my hairpins. (*She is almost staggering with fatigue.*)

DUNYASHA. I hardly know what to think of it. He loves me so!

ANYA (*looking into her bedroom, affectionately*). My room, my windows, just as if I had never gone away! I am home again! When I wake up in the morning I shall run out into the garden. . . . Oh, if only I could get to sleep! I haven't had a wink since we left Paris, I was so worried.

DUNYASHA. Mr Trofimov came the day before yesterday.

ANYA (*happily*). Petya!

DUNYASHA. He's sleeping in the bath-house, he's settled in there. He was afraid he might be in the way. (*Looking at her watch.*) I'd like to go and wake him, only Miss Varya told me not to. "Don't you wake him," she says.

Varya comes in with a bunch of keys at her waist

VARYA. Dunyasha, go and get some coffee, quick. Mamma wants some coffee.

DUNYASHA. In a minute! (*She goes out.*)

VARYA. Well, thank Heaven, you've come. Here you are at home again. (*Snuggling up to Anya.*) My little darling's come back! My pretty one's come back!

ANYA. The things I've had to go through!

VARYA. I can believe you.

ANYA. I left here in Passion Week—it was so cold then; all the way Charlotta kept talking and doing conjuring tricks. What on earth made you tie her round my neck?

VARYA. You couldn't have travelled alone, darling. At seventeen!

ANYA. When we got to Paris, it was cold there—snowing. My French is shocking. Mamma lived on the fifth floor. I went up and there I found a lot of Frenchmen with her, and ladies, and an old Catholic priest with a book, and the place was full of tobacco smoke and looked so drab. I suddenly felt sorry for Mamma, oh, so sorry! I clasped her head to my breast and couldn't let it go. And then Mamma kept kissing me and crying.

VARYA (*tearfully*). Please don't, I can't hear it.

ANYA. She'd sold her villa at Mentone, and had nothing left, absolutely nothing, and I hadn't a farthing either. We barely managed to get home. And Mamma won't understand! When we had dinner at the stations she always ordered the most expensive things and tipped the waiters a rouble each. So did Charlotta. And Yasha, too, must have the same as we. It was simply awful. Yasha is Mamma's manservant, you know, we've brought him back with us.

VARYA. Yes, I've seen the rascal.

ANYA. Well, now you tell me about everything. Have you paid the interest on the mortgage?

VARYA. No, how could we?

ANYA. Oh dear! Oh dear!

VARYA. The place will be sold in August.

ANYA. Dear me!

LOPAKHIN (*looking in at the door and mooing like a cow*). Moo-o. (*He goes away.*)

VARYA (*through her tears, and shaking her fist at the door*). Oh, I should like to give him one!

ANYA (*embracing Varya, softly*). Varya, has he proposed to you? (*Varya shakes her head.*) But he loves you! Why don't you come to an understanding? What are you waiting for?

VARYA. I don't think we'll get anywhere. He's so busy, he has no time for me—hardly notices me. Heaven help him, it's hard on me to have to see him. Everyone's talking about our marriage, and congratulating me, but actually there's nothing to it—it's all like a dream. (*In a different tone.*) You've got on a brooch just like a bee.

ANYA (*sadly*). Mamma bought it for me. (*Going into her room, talking light-heartedly, like a child.*) When I was in Paris I went up in a balloon!

VARYA. How glad I am you are back, my little pet! My pretty one!

Dnyasha has returned with a coffee-pot and is making coffee

VARYA (*standing by the door*). All I do all day long as I go about my work is dream of marrying you to some rich man. It would be a load off my mind. I would then

go on a pilgrimage to Kiev, to Moscow. . . . And so, I'd keep going about from one holy place to another. What bliss!

ANYA. The birds are singing in the garden. What time is it now?

VARYA. It must be past two. Time you were in bed, my darling. (*Following Anya into her room.*) What bliss!

Yasha comes in with a shawl and a travelling bag

YASHA (*Crossing the stage, with affected politeness.*) May I pass this way, please?

DUNYASHA. I shouldn't have known you, Yasha. How you've changed abroad!

YASHA. Ahem! And who may you be?

DUNYASHA. When you left here I was a little thing—this high. (*Indicating height from floor.*) I'm Dunyasha, Fedor Kozoyedov's daughter. You can't remember me!

YASHA. Ahem! What a peach! (*He looks round cautiously, then embraces her; she screams and drops a saucer. Yasha goes out hastily.*)

VARYA (*in the doorway, crossly*). What's all this?

DUNYASHA (*crying*). I've broken a saucer.

VARYA. Well, that's a sign of good luck.

Anya comes in from her room

ANYA. We ought to tell mother that Petya's here.

VARYA. I told them not to wake him.

ANYA (*thoughtfully*). It's just six years since Father died. And only a month later poor Grisha was drowned in the river, my pretty little brother—he was only seven then. It was more than poor Mamma could bear, she ran away to leave all this behind. (*Shuddering.*) How well I can understand her, if only she knew! (*Pause.*) And Petya Trofimov might remind her. He was Grisha's tutor.

Feers comes in wearing a long coat and white waistcoat

FEERS (*going over to the coffee-pot, anxiously*). She is going to take her coffee here. (*He puts on white gloves.*) Is the coffee ready? (*Sternly, to Dunyasha.*) You there, where's the cream?



finish my coffee, then we'll all go. (*Feers puts a footstool under her feet.*) Thank you, my dear. I'm used to my coffee and I drink it day and night. Thank you, you dear old man. (*She kisses Feers.*)

VARYA. I'll go and see if they've brought in all the things. (*She goes out.*)

RANEVSKAYA. Is it really me sitting here? (*Laughing.*) I feel like dancing—waving my arms. (*Covering her face with her hands.*) But what if this is a dream? God knows I love my country. I love it tenderly. I couldn't look out of the window in the train, I was crying so. (*Crying.*) I must drink my coffee, though. Thank you, Feers. Thank you, you dear old man. I'm so glad to find you still alive.

FEERS. The day before yesterday.

GAYEV. He's hard of hearing.

LOPAKHIN. I've got to leave for Kharkov soon after four this morning. Such a nuisance! I wanted to have a look at you and talk to you. You're as splendid as ever.

PISHCHIK (*breathing heavily*). Handsomer than ever and dressed like a Parisian. I'm lost now!

LOPAKHIN. Your brother here says I'm a cad and a money-grubber. He may say anything he likes for all I care. Only I want you to believe in me as you used to; I want your wonderful eyes to look at me as they used to. Merciful God! My father was your father's serf, and your grandfather's serf before him, but you—you did so much for me in the old days that I've forgotten all that, and I love you as though you were my own kin—in fact, more than that.

RANEVSKAYA. I can't sit still, I simply can't. (*Jumping up and walking about in great agitation.*) This happiness is too much for me. You may laugh at me—I know I'm silly—my darling old bookcase! (*She kisses the bookcase.*) My darling table.

GAYEV. Nurse died while you were away.

RANEVSKAYA (*sitting down and sipping her coffee*). Yes, God rest her soul. They wrote to me about it.

GAYEV. Anastasy is dead, too. Squint-eyed Pyotr has left us and now works at the police inspector's in town.



LOPAKHIN (*glancing at his watch*). If we don't think of a way and don't decide on anything, on the twenty-second of August the cherry orchard and the whole property will be sold by auction. So please, make up your mind. There's no other way out, I swear—none at all.

FEERS. In the old days, forty or fifty years ago, they used to dry the cherries and soak 'em and pickle 'em, and make jam of 'em; and the dried cherries—

GAYEV. Be quiet, Feers.

FEERS. The dried cherries used to be sent by cartfuls to Moscow and Kharkov. The money that brought in! The dried cherries were soft and juicy and sweet and good-smelling then. They knew how to do it in those days.

RANEVSKAYA. And why can't they do it now?

FEERS. They've forgotten. Nobody remembers how to do it.

PISHCHIK (*to Ranevskaya*). What's it like in Paris? Did you eat frogs there?

RANEVSKAYA. I ate crocodiles.

PISHCHIK. Fancy that!

LOPAKHIN. Until a little while ago only the gentry and peasants lived in the country; but now there are those summer-time tenants. All the towns, even the small ones, are surrounded nowadays by summer cottages. It is safe to say that in another twenty years or so the summer resident will have multiplied like anything. For the time being he does nothing but drink tea on his verandah, but he may well get down to working his bit of land, and then your cherry orchard will become rich, happy, and prosperous. . . .

GAYEV (*angrily*). What rubbish!

Varya and Yasha come in

VARYA (*picking out a key from her bunch and noisily unlocking the old-fashioned bookcase*). There are two telegrams for you, Mamma. Here they are.

RANEVSKAYA (*tearing them up without reading them*). From Paris. I've done with Paris.

GAYEV. Do you know how old this bookcase is, Lyuba? Last week I pulled out the bottom drawer and saw a



date branded inside it. It was made exactly a hundred years ago. What do you think of that, eh? We might celebrate its centenary. It's only an inanimate thing, but still it's a bookcase.

PISHCHIK (*astonished*). A hundred years! Fancy that!

GAYEV (*feeling the bookcase*). Yes, it's a wonderful thing. Dear and much respected bookcase! I greet your existence, which for more than a hundred years has served the noble ideals of justice and virtue. Your silent call for fruitful work has never relaxed these hundred years (*fearfully*), keeping up the courage of succeeding generations of our human kind and fostering faith in a brighter future and ideals of goodness and social consciousness. (*Pause.*)

LOPAKHIN. Ahem!

RANEVSKAYA. You haven't changed a bit, Leonid.

GAYEV (*slightly embarrassed*). Cannon off the red into the middle pocket!

LOPAKHIN (*looking at his watch*). Well, I must be off.

YASHA (*handing a box of medicine to Ranevskaya*). Perhaps you will take your pills now.

PISHCHIK. You oughtn't to take medicine, dear lady: it does neither good nor harm. Give that to me, my friend. (*He empties all the pills into his palm, blows on them, puts them in his mouth, and swallows them down with a draught of kvass.*) There!

RANEVSKAYA (*alarmed*). Why, you must be mad!

PISHCHIK. I've taken all the pills.

LOPAKHIN. What a gobbler! (*Everyone laughs.*)

FEERS. His honour was here during Easter week and finished off a gallon of pickles. (*Mumbling something.*)

RANEVSKAYA. What's he talking about?

VARYA. He's been mumbling like that for three years now. We're used to it.

YASHA. Advancing age.

Charlotte, very thin and tightly laced, in a white frock and with a *lorgnette* at her waist, crosses the stage.

LOPAKHIN. Excuse me, Charlotta. I've not greeted you yet. (*He attempts to kiss her hand.*)

CHARLOTTA (*drawing her hand away*). If a lady allows you to kiss her hand, you'll want to kiss her elbow next, and then her shoulder.

LOPAKHIN. No luck today. (*All laugh.*) Charlotta, show us a conjuring trick.

RANEVSKAYA. Charlotta, do show us some trick.

CHARLOTTA. No, thank you. I'm too sleepy. (*She goes out.*)

LOPAKHIN. We shall meet again in three weeks. (*Kissing Ranevskaya's hand.*) Meanwhile, good-bye. I must be going. (*To Gayev.*) Good-bye. (*Kissing Pishchik.*) Ta-ta. (*Shaking hands with Varya, then with Feers and Yasha.*) I hate having to go. (*To Ranevskaya.*) If you make up your mind about the cottages, let me know, and I'll raise you fifty thousand roubles or so. Think it over seriously.

VARYA (*angrily*). For heaven's sake, do go!

LOPAKHIN. I'm off. (*He goes out.*)

GAYEV. Cad! I beg pardon, though. Varya's going to marry him; he's Varya's young man.

VARYA. You talk too much, Uncle.

RANEVSKAYA. Why, Varya, I shall be very glad. He's a nice man.

PISHCHIK. A most worthy man, sure enough. My Dashenka also says—oh, she says lots of things. (*He snores but wakes up at once.*) By the by, dear lady, could you lend me 240 roubles? I've got to pay the interest on my mortgage tomorrow.

VARYA (*alarmed*). Oh no, we can't!

RANEVSKAYA. I really haven't any money.

PISHCHIK. I'll find it somewhere. (*Laughing*). I never lose hope. Last time I said to myself I was really done for, a ruined man, when all of a sudden a railway ran over my land and they paid me compensation. And so something may turn up again—tomorrow if not today. Dashenka may win two hundred thousand: she's got a lottery ticket.

RANEVSKAYA. The coffee's finished. Let's go to bed.

FEERS (*brushing Gayev, reprovingly*). You've put on the wrong trousers again. Whatever am I to do with you?

VARYA (*softly*). Anya's asleep. (*She gently opens the*

*window.*) The sun's up already; it isn't cold now. Look, Mamma, how lovely the trees are. Heavens! And the air! The starlings are singing!

GAYEV (*opening another window*). The orchard is all white. You've not forgotten it, Lyuba? This long avenue running straight on, like a taut belt, between the trees? It shines like silver on moonlit nights. Do you remember?

RANEVSKAYA (*looking out of the window*). Oh, my childhood, my pure and happy childhood! I used to sleep in this nursery. I used to look out from here into the garden. Happiness awoke with me every morning, and the orchard was just the same, nothing has changed. (*Laughing with joy.*) It is all white, all white! Oh, my orchard! After the dark and stormy autumn and the cold winter you are young again and full of happiness, and the angels of heaven have never left you. If only I could shake off the stone that weighs on my heart! If only I could forget my past!

GAYEV. And then, strange as it may seem, this orchard will be sold to pay our debts.

RANEVSKAYA. Look! There's Mamma walking ... in a white frock! (*Laughing with joy.*) It's she!

GAYEV. Where?

VARYA. Please, Mother.

RANEVSKAYA. There's no one there, I only fancied it. On the right, where the path turns down to the arbour, there's a bent birch-tree. It looks like a woman.

Trofimov, in a shabby student uniform and spectacles, comes in

What a wonderful orchard! White masses of blossom and a blue sky.

TROFIMOV. Madame! (*She looks round at him.*) I only want to say "How do you do" and then I'll go away. (*Kissing her hand warmly.*) I was told to wait till the morning, but I just couldn't.

Ranevskaya looks at him in perplexity

VARYA (*through her tears*). This is Pyotr Trofimov.

TROFIMOV. Pyotr Trofimov: I was your Grisha's tutor, you know. Can I have changed so much?

Ranevskaya embraces him and cries softly

GAYEV (*embarrassed*). There, there now, Lyuba!

VARYA (*crying*). I told you, Petya, to wait till the morning.

RANEVSKAYA. My little Grisha! My little boy! Grisha . . . my son. . .

VARYA. It can't be helped, Mamma, it was God's will.

TROFIMOV (*gently, through his tears*). There, there!

RANEVSKAYA (*crying softly*). He was drowned. My little boy was drowned. Why? Oh, why, my dear? (*More quietly.*) Anya's asleep in there, and I am talking so loudly, and making a noise. . . But tell me, Pyotr, why do you look so bad? Why have you aged so?

TROFIMOV. A peasant woman on the train called me a moth-eaten gentleman.

RANEVSKAYA. You were quite a boy then, a dear little student, and now your hair's thin and you wear spectacles. Are you really a student still? (*Going towards the door.*)

TROFIMOV. Yes, I suppose I shall be a perpetual student.

RANEVSKAYA (*kissing her brother and then Varya*). Well, go to bed. You've aged too, Leonid.

PISHCHIK (*following her*). So it's time we were asleep. Oh, oh, my gout! I'll stay the night here. Don't forget, my angel, tomorrow morning—240 roubles.

GAYEV. He keeps harping on the same string.

PISHCHIK. Two hundred and forty roubles, to pay the interest on my mortgage.

RANEVSKAYA. I have no money, my friend.

PISHCHIK. I'll pay you back, dear lady. It's a trifling sum, really.

RANEVSKAYA. Oh, well, Leonid will give it to you. Let him have it, Leonid.

GAYEV. Let him have it? He'll have a long wait.

RANEVSKAYA. It can't be helped, he needs it. He'll pay it back.

Ranevskaya, Trofimov, Pishchik and Feers go out

GAYEV. My sister hasn't got out of her old habit of flinging away her money. (*To Yasha.*) Step back, my lad. You smell of chicken.

YASHA (*with a grin*). You're just the same as ever, sir!

GAYEV. What's that? (*To Varya*.) What did he say?

VARYA (*to Yasha*). Your mother's come up from the village. She's been waiting for you since yesterday in the servant's hall. She wants to see you.

YASHA. I shall bother!

VARYA. Shame on you!

YASHA. Well, what do I want with her? Couldn't she have waited till tomorrow? (*He goes out*.)

VARYA. Mamma is just like she used to be, she hasn't changed a bit. If she had her way, she'd give away everything she has.

GAYEV. Yes. (*Pause*.) If very many cures are suggested for an illness, that means it is incurable. I keep thinking and racking my brains. I know of very many cures, which means that there aren't really any. How nice it would be to get a fortune or marry Anya off to a rich man. Or I might go to Yaroslavl and try my luck with my old aunt the Countess. She is very rich, you know.

VARYA (*crying*). If only God would help us!

GAYEV. Stop blubbering. Aunt's very rich, of course, but she doesn't care for us. First of all, sister married a solicitor and not a nobleman.

Anya appears in the doorway

She married a man who was not a nobleman and it's no good pretending that she has led a virtuous life. She's a dear, kind, charming creature, and I love her very much, but no matter what extenuating circumstances you think of, there's no denying that she's a sinful woman. You can see that in her every gesture.

VARYA (*whispering*). Anya is standing in the doorway.

GAYEV. What's that? (*Pause*.) It's very odd, something's got into my right eye. I can't see well any more. Last Thursday when I was down at the District Court—

Anya comes in

VARYA. Why aren't you in bed, Anya?

ANYA. I can't sleep. It's no good trying.

GAYEV. My little pet! (*Kissing Anya's hands and face.*) My little girl! (*Crying.*) You're not my niece, you're my angel, you're everything to me. Believe me . . . do!

ANYA. I do believe you, Uncle. Everybody likes and respects you; but dear, dear Uncle, you oughtn't to talk—you'd better keep quiet. What were you saying just now about Mamma, your own sister? What made you say that?

GAYEV. Yes, yes. (*Covering his face with her hand.*) You're quite right, it really was awful of me! Good Lord! Save me! And a little while ago I made a speech to the bookcase. So stupid of me! As soon as I had done it, I knew it was stupid.

VARYA. Yes, that's true, Uncle. You ought to keep quiet. Don't talk, that's all.

ANYA. You would feel better if you only held your tongue.

GAYEV. I will! (*Kissing Anya's and Varya's hands.*) I'll be dumb. Only one thing—it's about business. Last Thursday, when I was down at the District Court, there was a lot of people there and we got to talking about this and that, one thing and another, and it seems I could arrange a loan on a promissory note to pay the interest into the bank.

VARYA. If only Heaven would help us!

GAYEV. I'll go in on Tuesday and talk it over again. (*To Varya.*) Stop blubbering! (*To Anya.*) Your mother will have a talk with Lopakhin. Of course he won't refuse her. And as soon as you're rested you must go and see your grandmother, the Countess, in Yaroslavl. So we'll set to work in three directions at once, and the trick is done. We'll manage to pay the interest, I'm certain of it. (*He puts a fruit-drop in his mouth.*) I swear on my honour, or whatever you will, the property shan't be sold. (*Excitedly.*) I swear it by my happiness! Here's my hand on it, call me a mean, dishonest man if I let it go to auction. I swear it with all my heart!

ANYA (*calm again and happy*). What a dear you are,

Uncle, and how clever! (*She embraces him.*) Now I'm no longer worried. I feel easy again! I'm happy!

Feers comes in

FEERS (*reproachfully*). Have you no fear of God, sir? When are you going to bed?

GAYEV. In a moment. You get along, Feers. I'll manage without you and undress myself. Come, children, bye-bye! Details tomorrow, but now let's go to bed. (*Kissing Anya and Varya.*) I'm a man of the 'eighties. People frown on the 'eighties, but I may say I've had to smart for my convictions in my time. It's not for nothing that the peasants love me. You have to know the peasants; you have to know how—

ANYA. There you go again, Uncle!

VARYA. You'd better be quiet, Uncle dear.

FEERS (*angrily*). Sir!

GAYEV. I'm coming. Now go to bed. Off two cushions into the middle pocket! (*He goes with Feers shuffling after him.*)

ANYA. Now my mind's at rest. I don't want to go to Yaroslavl: I don't like grandmamma; but my mind's at rest, thanks to Uncle. (*She sits down.*)

VARYA. Time for bed. I'm off. While you were away there was a scandal here. You know that nobody lives in the old servants' quarters except old people—Yefim, Polya, Yevstignei and Karp. Well, they took to having in all sorts of stray people to spend the night. I didn't say a word. But all at once I heard they had spread a report that I hadn't let them have anything but peas. Out of stinginess, they said. It was all Yevstignei's doing. "Very well," I said to myself, "since that's how things are I'll teach you." I sent for Yevstignei. (*Yawning.*) He comes. "Now then, Yevstignei," I said, "you old fool, how could you—" (*Looking at Anya.*) Anya! (*Pause.*) She's asleep. (*Taking Anya's arm.*) Let's go to bed. Come along. (*Leading her away.*) My little one has fallen asleep! Come along!

They go towards Anya's room. In the distance beyond the orchard a shepherd is heard playing his pipe. Trofimov crosses the stage and, seeing Varya and Anya, stops

Sh! She's asleep. Come, my love.

ANYA (*drowsily*). I'm so tired! Those bells! Uncle, dear! Mamma! Uncle!

VARYA. Come, my love! Come along.

Varya and Anya go out to Anya's room

TROFIMOV (*tenderly*). My sunshine! My spring!

### *Curtain*

## ACT TWO

The open country; an old chapel, long abandoned and ramshackle. Near it a well; big slabs, apparently old tombstones, and an old bench. Road to the estate beyond. On one side rise dark poplars. Beyond them begins the cherry orchard. In the distance a row of telegraph poles, and far away on the horizon, the dim outlines of a big town, only visible in fine, clear weather. It is near sunset. Charlotta, Yasha, and Dunyasha sit on the bench. Yepikhodov stands by them and plays a guitar. All seem to be plunged in thought. Charlotta wears an old peaked cap. She has taken a rifle off her shoulder and is adjusting the buckle of the strap

CHARLOTTA (*thoughtfully*). I have no proper passport. I don't know how old I am. I fancy I am still young. When I was a little girl my father and mother used to go from one country fair to another, acting in sideshows, and very good ones too. I used to do the *salto mortale* and all sorts of tricks. When Papa and Mamma died, an old German lady adopted me and taught me. That was alright. When I grew up I became a governess. But I have no idea who I am or where I come from. Who my parents were I don't know—very likely they weren't married at all. (*She takes a cucumber from her pocket and munches at it.*) I don't know a thing. (*Pause.*) I long to talk so, and there's no one to talk to, no friends or relatives.

YEPIKHODOV (*playing the guitar and singing*).

"What is the noisy world to me?

Oh, what are friends and foes?" . . .



How sweet it is to play a mandolin!

DUNYASHA. That's a guitar, not a mandolin. (*She looks at herself in a hand-glass and powders her face.*)

YEPIKHODOV. To one mad with love it is a mandolin. (*Singing.*) "Oh, that my heart were cheered  
By the warmth of requited love."

Yasha joins in

CHARLOTTA. How shockingly these people sing! Fie! Like jackals howling!

DUNYASHA (*to Yasha*). What happiness it must be to visit foreign lands!

YASHA. Yes, I quite agree with you. (*He yawns and lights a cigar.*)

YEPIKHODOV. That goes without saying. Everything abroad has attained a full complexion.

YASHA. It certainly has.

YEPIKHODOV. I am a well-read man, I have studied various remarkable books, but I cannot make out the trend of my preferences. I don't know whether I should live or, speaking bluntly, shoot myself. But I always carry a revolver in my pocket, just in case. Here it is. (*Shows revolver.*)

CHARLOTTA. That's done. I'll be going now. (*Slinging the rifle over her shoulder.*) You're a clever fellow, Yepikhodov, and very alarming. Women must fall madly in love with you. Brrr! (*Going.*) These clever people are all so stupid—there's no one to talk to. I am always alone, always alone—I have no friends or relatives, and nobody can tell who I am, or why I live. (*She walks out slowly.*)

YEPIKHODOV. Strictly speaking, without touching upon other matters, I must protest, by the way, that destiny tosses me about as a tempest might a small ship. If I labour under a misapprehension, then why is it that I woke up this morning and saw sitting on my chest a spider of fearful size—this big? (*Indicating with both hands.*) And if I go to take a draught of kvass, I am sure to find in it something of the most unseemly character, in the nature of a cockroach. (*Pause.*) Have

you read Buckle? (*Pause; to Dunyasha.*) I should like to trouble you for a moment.

DUNYASHA. Speak up.

YEPIKHODOV. I should prefer to have the talk in private. (*He draws a sigh.*)

DUNYASHA (*embarrassed*). Very well, only first please fetch me my cloak. It's by the wardrobe. It's rather damp here.

YEPIKHODOV. Certainly, I'll fetch it. Now I know what I should do with my revolver. (*He takes his guitar and goes out, playing.*)

YASHA. Twenty-Two Misfortunes! Between you and me, he's a fool. (*Yawning.*)

DUNYASHA. The Lord keep him from shooting himself. (*Pause.*) I've grown so nervous, I am always in a twitter. I was quite a little girl when they took me into our lady's house, and now I've quite grown out of common ways, and my hands are as white as a lady's. I'm so sensitive and delicate, I am afraid of everything. I'm always frightened. And if you deceive me, Yasha, I don't know what will happen to my nerves.

YASHA (*kissing her*). You're a peach! However, a girl must never forget herself. What I hate is a girl being flighty in her behaviour.

DUNYASHA. I'm dreadfully in love with you. You're so educated—you can talk about anything! (*Pause.*)

YASHA (*yawning*). Yes. . . . The way I see it is this: if a girl falls in love with anybody, she must be immoral. (*Pause.*) How pleasant it is to smoke one's cigar in the open air. (*Listening.*) Someone's coming. It's the gentlefolk. (*Dunyasha embraces him impulsively.*) Go towards the house as if you'd just been for a bathe. Go by this path or else when they meet you they'll think I've been out with you. I can't stand that sort of thing.

DUNYASHA (*clearing her throat*). Your cigar has given me a headache. (*She goes out.*)

Yasha remains sitting by the chapel. Ranevskaya, Gayev, and Lopakhin come in

LOPAKHIN. You must make up your mind once and for all. Time waits for no man. The question is

perfectly simple. Are you going to lease the land for cottages or not? Answer in one word: yes or no? Only one word!

RANEVSKAYA. Who's smoking horrible cigars here? (*She sits down.*)

GAYEV. Now they've built the railway, it's made things very convenient. (*Sitting down.*) We've been over and lunched in town. Cannon off the white! I'd like to go in and have a game.

RANEVSKAYA. There's no hurry.

LOPAKHIN. Only one word—yes or no! (*Entreatingly.*) Come, give me the answer!

GAYEV (*yawning*). What's that?

RANEVSKAYA (*looking into her purse*). I had a lot of money yesterday but there's hardly any left now. Poor Varya tries to save money by feeding us all on milk soup; the old people in the kitchen get nothing but peas, and yet here I am squandering money. (*Dropping her purse and scattering gold coins; vexed.*) There, I've dropped it all!

YASHA. Allow me, I'll pick it up. (*Collecting the coins.*)

RANEVSKAYA. Yes, please do, Yasha! Whatever made me go to town for lunch? I hate your horried restaurant with its music and its table-cloths all smelling of soap. Why do you drink so much, Leonid? Why do you eat so much? Why do you talk so much? You talked too much at the restaurant again, and all so out of place, about the 'seventies, and the decadents. And to whom? Fancy talking about decadents to the waiters!

LOPAKHIN. You're right.

GAYEV (*with a gesture*). I'm incorrigible, that's plain. (*Irritably to Yasha.*) Must you keep dodging about in front of me?

YASHA (*laughing*). I can't hear your voice without laughing.

GAYEV (*to Ranevskaya*). Either he or I!

RANEVSKAYA. Go away, Yasha; run along.

YASHA (*handing Ranevskaya her purse*). Directly. (*Keeping back his laughter with an effort.*) This very minute. (*He goes out.*)

LOPAKHIN. Deriganov, the millionaire, wants to buy your estate. They say he's coming to the auction himself.

RANEVSKAYA. Where did you hear that?

LOPAKHIN. I was told so in town.

GAYEV. Our aunt in Yaroslavl has promised to send something; but I don't know when, or how much.

LOPAKHIN. How much will she send? A hundred thousand? Two hundred?

RANEVSKAYA. Oh, come. Ten or fifteen thousand at the most. We should be thankful for that.

LOPAKHIN. Excuse me, but in all my life I never met anybody so flippant as you two, so crazy and unbusiness-like! I tell you your property is going to be sold, and you don't seem to understand it.

RANEVSKAYA. Well, what are we to do? Tell us what you want us to do.

LOPAKHIN. Don't I tell you every day? Every day I say the same thing over and over again. You must lease off the cherry orchard and the rest of the estate for summer cottages; you must do it at once, this very moment—the auction will be on you in two shakes! Try and understand. Once you make up your mind about the cottages, you get all the money you want, and you're saved.

RANEVSKAYA. Summer cottages and summer residents, it's all so vulgar, if you don't mind my saying it.

GAYEV. I quite agree with you.

LOPAKHIN. I shall either cry, or scream, or have a fit. I can't stand it! You'll be my undoing. (*To Gayev.*) You're a sissy!

GAYEV. What's that?

LOPAKHIN. You're a sissy! (*He starts to go.*)

RANEVSKAYA (*frightened*). Oh, don't go. Please stay, there's a dear! Perhaps we can think of some way.

LOPAKHIN. What's there to think of!

RANEVSKAYA. Don't go, please; I entreat you. I feel more cheerful when you're here. (*Pause.*) I keep expecting something to happen, as if the house were going to tumble down about our ears.

GAYEV (*in deep abstraction*). Cannon off the white. Double into the middle pocket.

RANEVSKAYA. We have been great sinners!

LOPAKHIN. You! What sins could you have committed?

GAYEV (*putting a fruit-drop in his mouth*). They say I've eaten up my fortune in sugar candy. (*Laughing.*)

RANEVSKAYA. Oh, the sins that I have committed! I've always squandered money recklessly, like a crazy woman; I married a man who made nothing but debts. My husband died of champagne—he was a fearful drinker. Then, in an unlucky hour, I fell in love and went off with another man: and just then—that was my first punishment—a cruel blow . . . here, in this very river . . . my little boy was drowned; and I went abroad never to come back, never to see this river again. I shut my eyes and fled as in a daze, and that man pursued me, pitilessly, cruelly. I bought a villa at Mentone, because he fell ill there, and for three years I had no rest day or night. The sick man tormented me, his illness wore me out. Then, last year, when my villa was sold to pay my debts, I went off to Paris, and there he robbed me of everything, left me for another woman, and I tried to take poison. It was all so stupid, so humiliating! And suddenly I longed to be back in Russia, in my own country, with my little girl. . . . (*Wiping away her tears.*) Lord, be merciful to me. Forgive my sins! Do not punish me any more! (*She takes a telegram from her pocket.*) I got this today from Paris. He asks my forgiveness, begs me to go back. (*Tearing up the telegram.*) Isn't that music I hear? (*She listens.*)

GAYEV. That's our famous Jewish orchestra. You remember? Four fiddles, a flute, and a double bass.

RANEVSKAYA. Does it still exist? We ought to send for them some time and have a dance.

LOPAKHIN (*listening*). I don't hear anything. (*Singing softly.*)

"The Germans for a fee will turn  
A Russ into a Frenchman."

(*Laughing.*) I saw a very funny piece at the theatre last night: awfully funny!

RANEVSKAYA. It probably wasn't at all funny. You oughtn't to see plays: you ought to try to see yourselves—

to see what a dull life you lead, and how much you talk.

LOPAKHIN. That's true. I must say it in all fairness—we live like fools. (*Pause.*) My father was a muzhik, an idiot who understood nothing and taught me nothing. All he did was to beat me, when he was drunk, with a stick. As a matter of fact I'm just as big a dolt and idiot as he was. I never studied properly, my handwriting's awful; I write so poorly it's a shame.

RANEVSKAYA. You ought to get married, my dear man.

LOPAKHIN. Yes, that's true.

RANEVSKAYA. Why not marry our Varya? She's a nice girl.

LOPAKHIN. Yes.

RANEVSKAYA. She's a nice, simple-hearted creature; she works all day, and what's more, she loves you. And you've been fond of her for a long time.

LOPAKHIN. Well, why not? I'm quite willing. She's a very nice girl. (*Pause.*)

GAYEV. I've been offered a place in a bank. Six thousand roubles a year. Have you heard about it?

RANEVSKAYA. You in a bank! Stay where you are.

Feers comes in carrying an overcoat

FEERS (*to Gayev*). Put it on, sir, it's getting damp.

GAYEV (*putting on the coat*). What a nuisance you are, Feers!

FEERS. That won't do, sir—you went off and never told me. (*Examining his clothes.*)

RANEVSKAYA. How old you've got, Feers!

FEERS. I beg your pardon?

LOPAKHIN. She says how old you've got!

FEERS. I've been alive a long time. When they found me a wife, your father wasn't born yet. (*He laughs.*) And when they free the serfs, I was already chief valet. But I wouldn't have any freedom then; I stayed with the master. (*Pause.*) I remember how happy everybody was, but why they were happy they didn't know.

LOPAKHIN. Those were good times. At least there was flogging then.

FEERS (*mishearing him*). Why, of course! The peasants minded the masters, and the masters minded the peasants, but now it's all higgledy-piggledy; you can't make head or tail of it.

GAYEV. Don't talk, Feers. I must go to town again tomorrow. I've been promised an introduction to a general who can lend money on a bill.

LOPAKHIN. It'll be no good. You won't even be able to pay the interest, take my word for that.

RANEVSKAYA (*to Lopakhin*). That's all his nonsense. There's no such general at all.

Trofimov, Anya, and Varya come in

GAYEV. Here come our girls.

ANYA. Here's Mamma.

RANEVSKAYA (*tenderly*). Come along, come along, my little ones. (*Embracing Anya and Varya.*) If only you knew how much I love you both! Sit down by my side, that's it. (*Everybody sits down.*)

LOPAKHIN. The perpetual student's always with the girls.

TROFIMOV. Mind your own business.

LOPAKHIN. He's nearly fifty and still a student.

TROFIMOV. Stop your idiotic jokes.

LOPAKHIN. What are you losing your temper for?

TROFIMOV. Why can't you leave me alone?

LOPAKHIN (*laughing*). I should like to know what you think of me.

TROFIMOV. This is what I think of you, Yermolai. You're a rich man, you'll soon be a millionaire. Just as, for the conversion of matter, a beast of prey is necessary, which devours everything that comes its way, so you are necessary too.

All laugh

VARYA. Better tell us something about the planets, Petya.

RANEVSKAYA. No, let's pick up the talk we were having yesterday.

TROFIMOV. What about?

GAYEV. About pride.

TROFIMOV. We had a long talk yesterday, but it didn't get us anywhere. Pride, as you use the word, has an element of the mystical. You may be right from your own point of view, but if we look at it simple-mindedly, what room is there for pride? Is there any sense in it, when man is so poorly constructed in terms of physiology, when the vast majority of us are so gross and stupid and profoundly unhappy? We must give up admiring ourselves. The only thing to do is to work.

GAYEV. We shall die all the same.

TROFIMOV. Who knows? And what does it mean, to die? Perhaps man has a hundred senses, and when he dies only the five senses that we know perish with him, and the other ninety-five remain alive.

RANEVSKAYA. How clever you are, Petya.

LOPAKHIN (*ironically*). Oh, extraordinary!

TROFIMOV. Mankind marches forward, perfecting itself. All that we find unattainable now will some day be near and clear; but we must work, we must do our utmost to help those who seek after truth. At present very few work in Russia. The vast majority of the educated people that I know seek after nothing, do nothing, and are as yet incapable of work. They call themselves the "intelligentsia", but they speak rudely to the servants, they treat the peasants like animals, learn nothing, read nothing serious, do absolutely nothing, only talk about science, and know little or nothing about art. They are all serious, and all wear solemn faces; they discuss important subjects and air their theories; but meanwhile workers eat abominably and sleep in filth and stuffiness without pillows. There are as many as forty of them sleeping in one room and bugs everywhere, and the stench and damp and moral impurity. It's plain that all our clever talk is only meant to distract our attention and other people's. Show me where those crèches are that they're always talking so much about, or those reading-rooms. They are only things people write about in novels—they don't really exist at all. There's nothing but dirt, vulgarity, and Asiatic ways. I am afraid of serious faces, I dislike them, I am afraid of serious conversations. We had better hold our tongues.



LOPAKHIN. You know, I get up soon after four every morning, I work from morning till night; I am always handling my own money or other people's and I see the sort of men there are about me. You have only to begin doing something to see how few honest and decent people there are. Sometimes, as I lie awake at night, I say to myself: "O Lord, you have given us mighty forests, boundless fields, the widest horizons, and we who live here ought really to be giants."

RANEVSKAYA. You want giants! They are all very well in fairy stories, but in real life they are rather alarming. (*Yepikhodov passes at the back of the scene, playing his guitar.*) There goes Yepikhodov.

ANYA (*pensively*). There goes Yepikhodov.

GAYEV. The sun has set.

TROFIMOV. Yes.

GAYEV (*as if reciting, not loud*). O Nature, wonderful Nature, you glow with eternal light; beautiful and indifferent, you whom we call our Mother, uniting in yourself both life and death, you animate and you destroy....

VARYA (*entreatingly*). Uncle!

ANYA. You're at it again, Uncle!

TROFIMOV. You'd much better be cannoning off the red.

GAYEV. I'll hold my tongue! I will!

All sit plunged in thought. Perfect silence, broken only by the mumblings of old Feers. Suddenly a distant sound is heard as if from the sky, the sound of a string snapping—dying away, melancholy

RANEVSKAYA. What was that?

LOPAKHIN. I don't know. Probably a lifting-tub's given away somewhere far in the mines. Only it must be a long way off.

GAYEV. Perhaps it's some sort of bird—a heron, or something.

TROFIMOV. Or an owl.

RANEVSKAYA (*shuddering*). There's something uncanny about it. (*Pause.*)

FEERS. The same thing happened before the great misfortune; the owl screeched and the samovar kept humming.

GAYEV. What great misfortune?

FEERS. The Liberation. (*Pause.*)

RANEVSKAYA. Come, let us all go in: it's getting late. (*To Anya.*) You've tears in your eyes. What is it, little one? (*Embracing her.*)

ANYA. Nothing, Mamma, I'm all right.

TROFIMOV. There's someone coming.

A wayfarer appears in a torn white peaked cap and overcoat. He is slightly drunk

WAYFARER. Excuse me, but can I get to the station this way?

GAYEV. Yes. Take this road.

WAYFARER. I am uncommonly obliged to you, sir. (*Clearing his throat.*) We're having lovely weather. (*He recites.*) "Brother, my suffering brother. . . . Come forth to the Volga, who groans—" (*To Varya.*) Mademoiselle, please spare some kopeks for a hungry fellow countryman.

Varya, frightened, screams

LOPAKHIN (*angrily*). There's a decent way for every outrageous thing!

RANEVSKAYA (*put out*). Here, take this. (*Fumbling in her purse.*) I haven't any silver. . . . Never mind, here is a gold rouble.

WAYFARER. I am uncommonly obliged to you, madam. (*He goes off. Laughter.*)

VARYA (*frightened*). I'd better go! I'm going! Oh, Mamma, there's nothing for the servants to eat at home, and you've gone and given that man a rouble.

RANEVSKAYA. What's to be done with your stupid old mother? I'll turn over to you everything I have when we get home. Yermolai, lend me some more money.

LOPAKHIN. Certainly.

RANEVSKAYA. Come along, everyone; it's time to turn in. We've settled all about your marriage, Varya. Congratulations.

VARYA (*through her tears*). This is no joking matter, Mamma.

LOPAKHIN. Ophelia, get thee to a nunnery!

GAYEV. My hands are all trembling; it's ages since I played a game of billiards.

LOPAKHIN. Ophelia, nymph, in thine orisons be all my sins remember'd.

RANEVSKAYA. Come along. It's nearly supper-time.

VARYA. How he frightened me! My heart's still thumping.

LOPAKHIN. Allow me to remind you, the cherry orchard is to be sold on the twenty-second of August. Bear that in mind, bear that in mind!

All go off except Trofimov and Anya

ANYA (*laughing*). Many thanks to that tramp for frightening Varya; at last we are alone.

TROFIMOV. Varya's afraid we may fall in love with each other, and for days on end she won't leave us alone. With her narrow mind she cannot understand that we are above love. To avoid everything petty, everything illusory, everything that prevents us from being free and happy, that is the whole meaning and purpose of our life. Forward! We march on irresistibly towards that bright star that shines far ahead! Forward! Don't fall behind, friends.

ANYA (*clasping her hands*). How beautifully you speak! (*Pause.*) Isn't it enchanting here today?

TROFIMOV. Yes, it's wonderful weather.

ANYA. What have you done to me, Petya? Why is it that I no longer love the cherry orchard as I did? I used to love it so dearly; I thought there was no place on earth like our garden.

TROFIMOV. All Russia is our garden. The earth is great and beautiful; there are many wonderful places in it. (*Pause.*) Just think, Anya, your grandfather, your great-grandfather and all your ancestors were serf-owners, owners of living souls. Do not human faces look out at you from every tree in the orchard, from every leaf and trunk? Can't you hear their voices? . . . Owning people—why, it has transformed you all, both your ancestors and yourselves, so that neither you nor your mother nor your uncle realise that you are living on credit, at the expense

of those whom you never admit into your house. Yes, we are at least two hundred years behind the times. We have achieved nothing at all as yet; we have no attitude towards the past; we only philosophise, complain of boredom, or drink vodka. It is so obvious that to live in the present, we must first redeem the past, and have done with it; and it is only by suffering that we can redeem it, by strenuous, unremitting toil. Understand that, Anya.

ANYA. The house we live in has long since ceased to be our own, and I shall go away, I give you my word.

TROFIMOV. If you have the household keys, throw them in the well and away. Be as free as the wind.

ANYA (*enthusiastically*). How beautifully you put it!

TROFIMOV. Believe me, Anya, believe me! I'm not thirty yet; I am still young, still a student, but what I have gone through! As soon as winter comes I am hungry, ill, worried, poor as a beggar. Fate has tossed me hither and thither; I have been everywhere, everywhere. And yet every minute, day and night, my soul has been full of unaccountable anticipations. I feel the approach of happiness, Anya—I almost see it coming.

ANYA (*pensively*). The moon is rising.

Yepikhodov is heard still playing the same sad tune on his guitar. The moon rises. Somewhere beyond the poplar-trees, Varya is heard calling for Anya: "Anya, where are you?"

TROFIMOV. Yes, the moon is rising. (*Pause.*) There it is, happiness, here it comes, nearer and nearer—I can hear the sound of its footsteps. And if we do not live to see it, if we never know it, what does it matter? Others will see it.

VARYA (*off-stage*). Anya! Where are you?

TROFIMOV. There's that Varya again! (*Angrily.*) What a nuisance.

ANYA. Never mind. Let's go down to the river. It's lovely there.

TROFIMOV. Come on! (*They go.*)

VARYA (*off-stage*). Anya! Anya!

*Curtain*

## ACT THREE

A sitting-room separated by an arch from a big drawing-room behind. Chandelier lighted. The Jewish band mentioned in Act Two is heard playing in the ante-room. Evening. In the drawing-room they are dancing the grand rond. Simeonov-Pishchik is heard crying: "Promenade à une paire!" The dancers enter the sitting-room in pairs, first Pishchik and Charlotta, then Trofimov and Ranevskaya; the third pair is Anya and the post-office official, the fourth Varya and the stationmaster, and so on. Varya is crying softly and wiping away her tears as she dances. The last pair is Dunyasha and her partner. They cross the sitting-room.

PISHCHIK. Grand rond, balancez! Les cavaliers à genoux et remerciez vos dames!

Fears in evening dress brings in seltzer water on a tray. Pishchik and Trofimov come into the sitting-room

PISHCHIK. I am a full-blooded man; I've had two strokes already. It's hard work dancing, but, as the saying goes: "If you run with the pack, bark or no, but wag your tail." I'm as strong as a horse. My old father, who was fond of his joke, God rest his soul, used to say about our family tree that the ancient stock of the Simeonov-Pishchiks was descended from that very horse that Caligula made a senator. . . . (*Sitting.*) But the worst of it is, I've got no money. A hungry dog believes in nothing but meat. (*He snores but wakes up at once.*) Just like me. I can think of nothing but money.

TROFIMOV. There really is something horse-like about your appearance.

PISHCHIK. Well, a horse is a fine creature. You can sell it.

A sound of billiards being played in the adjoining room. Varya appears in the drawing-room under the arch

TROFIMOV (*teasing her*). Madame Lopakhina! Madame Lopakhina!

VARYA (*angrily*). Moth-eaten gentleman!

TROFIMOV. Yes, I'm a moth-eaten gentleman, and I'm proud of it.

VARYA (*bitterly*). We've hired the band, but where's the money to pay for it? (*She goes out.*)

TROFIMOV (*to Pishchik*). If the energy you have spent during your lifetime in looking for money to pay your interest had been diverted to some other purpose, you might have turned the world upside down.

PISHCHIK. Nietzsche, the philosopher, a very great and celebrated man . . . a man of enormous intellect, says in his works that it's quite right to forge banknotes.

TROFIMOV. Have you read Nietzsche?

PISHCHIK. Well, Dashenka told me. And I'm in such a hole, I'm ready to forge 'em. I've got to pay 310 roubles the day after tomorrow. . . . I've got 130 already. (*Feeling his pockets, alarmed.*) My money's gone! I've lost it! (*Tearfully.*) Where's my money? (*Joyfully.*) Here it is, inside the lining. It's made me hot all over.

Ranevskaya and Charlotta come in

RANEVSKAYA (*humming the Lezghinka\**). Why is Leonid so long? What can he be doing in town? (*To Dunyasha.*) Dunyasha, ask the musicians if they'll have some tea.

TROFIMOV. The sale did not come off, most likely.

RANEVSKAYA. It was no time for the musicians to have come, and we oughtn't to have got up this dance. Well, it can't be helped. (*She sits down and hums to herself.*)

CHARLOTTA (*giving Pishchik a pack of cards*). Here's a pack of cards. Think of any card you like.

PISHCHIK. I've thought of one.

CHARLOTTA. Now shuffle the pack. That's right. Give it to me, oh, most worthy Mr Pishchik. Ein, zwei, drei! Now look—it's in your pocket.

PISHCHIK (*taking a card from his pocket*). The Eight of Spades! You're perfectly right. (*Astonished.*) Fancy that!

CHARLOTTA (*holding the pack on her palm. To Trofimov*). Tell me quickly, what's the top card?

TROFIMOV. Well, say the Queen of Spades.

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\* A Caucasian dance.

CHARLOTTA. Right! (*To Pishchik.*) Now then, what's the top card?

PISHCHIK. Ace of Hearts.

CHARLOTTA. Right! (*She claps her hands, the pack of cards disappears.*) Ah! What lovely weather it is today. (*A mysterious female voice, which seems coming from under the floor, answers her: "Oh, yes, simply magnificent, madam."*) You are my beautiful ideal.

THE VOICE. I think you very beautiful, too, madam.

STATIONMASTER (*applauding*). Bravo, Miss Ventriiloquist!

PISHCHIK (*astonished*). Fancy that! Bewitching Charlotta, I'm head over ears in love with you.

CHARLOTTA. In love! (*Shrugging her shoulders.*) Are you capable of love? Guter Mensch, aber schlechter Musikant!

TROFIMOV (*slapping Pishchik on the shoulder*). You old horse!

CHARLOTTA. Now attention, please; one more trick. (*Taking a shawl from a chair.*) Now here's a shawl, and a very pretty shawl; I'm going to sell this very pretty shawl. (*Shaking it.*) Who'll buy? Who'll buy?

PISHCHIK (*astonished*). Fancy that!

CHARLOTTA. Ein, zwei, drei! (*She lifts the shawl quickly and reveals Anya, who drops a curtsy, runs to her mother, embraces her, then runs up into the drawing-room amid general enthusiasm.*)

RANEVSKAYA (*applauding*). Bravo! Bravo!

CHARLOTTA. Once more. Ein, zwei, drei! (*She lifts the shawl and reveals Uarya, who takes a bow.*)

PISHCHIK (*astonished*). Fancy that!

CHARLOTTA. That's all. (*She throws the shawl over Pishchik, makes a curtsy, and runs up into the drawing-room.*)

PISHCHIK (*hurrying after her*). You little rascal... What a girl! What a girl! (*He goes out.*)

RANEVSKAYA. And still no sign of Leonid. What can he be doing in town so long? It must be all over by now; the property's sold; or the auction never came off; why does he keep me so long in suspense?

VARYA (*trying to console her*). Uncle has bought it, I am sure of that.

TROFIMOV (*mockingly*). He certainly has!

VARYA. Grannie sent him a power of attorney to buy it in her name and transfer the mortgage. She's done it for Anya's sake. I'm perfectly sure God will be merciful and Uncle will buy it.

RANEVSKAYA. Your Yaroslavl grannie sent fifteen thousand roubles to buy the property in her name—she doesn't trust us—but that's not enough even to pay the interest. (*She covers her face with her hands.*) My fate is being decided today, yes, my fate.

TROFIMOV (*teasing Varya*). Madame Lopakhina!

VARYA (*angrily*). Perpetual student! He's been expelled twice from the University.

RANEVSKAYA. Why do you get angry, Varya? What if he calls you Madame Lopakhina for fun. You can marry Lopakhin if you like, he's a nice likeable man; you needn't if you don't. Nobody wants to force you, my pet.

VARYA. I take it very seriously, Mamma. He's a nice man and I like him.

RANEVSKAYA. Then marry him. I can't see what you're waiting for.

VARYA. But I can't propose to him myself, can I? For two years now everybody's been talking about him to me, everyone; but he either says nothing or makes a joke of it. Of course, I understand. He's growing rich, he's always busy and has no time for me. If I had some money, just a little, even a hundred roubles, I would give up everything and go away. I would become a nun.

TROFIMOV (*mocking*). What bliss!

VARYA (*to Trofimov*). A student ought to be intelligent. (*In a gentler tone, crying.*) How ugly you've grown, Petya. How old you look! (*To Ranevskaya, no longer crying.*) But I can't be idle, Mamma. I must have something to do every minute of the day.

Yasha comes in

YASHA (*restraining his laughter with an effort*). Yepikhodov's broken a billiard cue. (*He goes out.*)

VARYA. What's Yepikhodov doing here? Who gave



him leave to play billiards? I don't understand these people. (*She goes out.*)

RANEVSKAYA. Don't tease her, Petya. Don't you see that she's unhappy enough as it is?

TROFIMOV. I wish she wouldn't be such a busybody, always meddling in other people's affairs. All summer she's given Anya and me no peace. She's afraid we might fall in love with each other. What business is it of hers? Besides, I never gave her any grounds, I'm not likely to be so commonplace. We are above love.

RANEVSKAYA. Then I suppose I must be beneath love. (*Deeply agitated.*) Why doesn't Leonid come? Oh, if only I knew whether the property's sold or not! It seems such an incredible calamity that I don't know what to think. I'm bewildered. . . . I shall burst out screaming, I shall do something idiotic. Save me, Petya, tell me something, talk to me!

TROFIMOV. What does it matter whether the property is sold today or not? It's all over and done with. There's no turning back, the path is overgrown. Calm yourself, dear Madame Ranevskaya. You mustn't deceive yourself any longer; for once you must face the truth.

RANEVSKAYA. What truth? You can see what's true, and what's untrue, but I seem to have lost my eyesight—I see nothing. My dear boy, you solve every great problem so boldly, but tell me, Petya, isn't that because you're young, because you never had to suffer in solving any problem of yours? You look boldly ahead. Isn't that only because you don't see or expect anything dreadful, because life is still hidden from your young eyes? You are bolder, honester, deeper than we are, but think about it all, show me but a hair's breadth of consideration, take pity on me. Don't you see? I was born here, my father and mother lived here, and so did my grandfather; I love this house; without the cherry orchard my life has no meaning for me, and if it *must* be sold, then for Heaven's sake sell me too! (*Embracing Trofimov and kissing him on the forehead.*) My little boy was drowned here. (*Crying.*) Be kind to me, dear, good Petya.

TROFIMOV. You know I feel for you with all my heart.

RANEVSKAYA. Yes, of course, only you ought to have said it somehow differently. (*A telegram falls to the floor as she takes out her handkerchief.*) I am so wretched to-day, you can't imagine! All this noise jars on me, I start at every sound. I tremble all over, but I can't remain alone—the silence terrifies me. Don't judge me harshly, Petya; I love you like a son. I would gladly let Anya marry you—I swear I would—only, my dear boy, you must work, Petya, you must get your degree at least. You do nothing—you're tossed about from place to place—so odd, isn't it? You agree, don't you? And you must do something to your beard to make it grow nicer. (*Laughing.*) How funny you look!

TROFIMOV (*picking up the telegram*). I don't wish to be an Adonis.

RANEVSKAYA. It's a telegram from Paris. I get one every day. One came yesterday, another today. That savage is ill again, he's in a bad way.... He asks me to forgive him and to come, and I really ought to go to Paris to be with him. You look at me sternly—but what am I to do, my dear boy, what am I to do? He's ill, he's lonely and unhappy. Who is to look after him? Who is to keep him from doing stupid things, to give him his medicine at the right time? Why should I be ashamed to own it? I love him, that's plain. I love him. It's like a millstone tied round my neck, it's dragging me down to the bottom, but I love my stone and can't live without it. (*She presses Trofimov's hand.*) Don't think ill of me, Petya, don't say anything—please don't.

TROFIMOV (*through tears*). Do forgive my bluntness, for God's sake, but the man has robbed you.

RANEVSKAYA. No, no, no! (*Stopping her ears.*) You mustn't say that!

TROFIMOV. He's a scoundrel; everybody sees it but yourself; he's a petty scoundrel, a nonentity.

RANEVSKAYA (*angry but speaking with restraint*). You're twenty-six or twenty-seven, and you're still a lower-school boy!

TROFIMOV. Who cares?

RANEVSKAYA. It's time you were a man! You should understand people who do love. You ought to love

someone yourself, you ought to be in love! (*Angrily.*) Yes, yes! It's not purity—it's simply you're a prig, an oddity, a freak.

TROFIMOV (*horrified*). How can she talk like that?

RANEVSKAYA. "I am above love!" You're not above love, but simply, as our Feers here says, a good-for-nothing. At your age you ought to have had a mistress!

TROFIMOV (*aghast*). This is awful! How can she talk like that! (*Going quickly into the drawing-room, clasping his head in his hands.*) This is something awful! I can't stand it! I'm going. (*He goes off, but returns at once.*) I won't have anything more to do with you. (*He goes off into the ante-room.*)

RANEVSKAYA (*calling after him*). Wait a minute, Petya! Don't be silly, I was only joking! Petya!

Someone is heard running downstairs, and then there is a sudden crash. Anya and Varya scream behind the scenes but a moment later there is a sound of laughter

RANEVSKAYA. What's the matter?

Anya runs in

ANYA (*laughing*). Petya's tumbled downstairs. (*She runs out again.*)

RANEVSKAYA. What a queer fellow he is!

The stationmaster is seen halting in the middle of the drawing-room and reciting Alexei Tolstoy's poem, *The Sinner*. Everybody stops to listen, but after a few lines the sound of a waltz is heard from the ante-room, and he breaks off. All dance. Trofimov, Anya, Varya, and Ranevskaya come in from the ante-room

RANEVSKAYA. Come, Petya—come, you pure soul. I apologize. Let's dance. (*She dances with Trofimov.*)

Anya and Varya dance. Feers comes in and leans his walking-stick against the side door. Yasha comes in from the sitting-room; he stands looking at the dancers

YASHA. Well, grandfather?

FEERS. I'm not feeling well. In the old days it was generals and barons and admirals that came to our dances, and now we send for the post-office clerk and the stationmaster, and even they are not too anxious to come. I feel sort of weak all over. The old master, their grandfather,

used to give us all sealing wax for all complaints. I've taken sealing wax every day for twenty years and more. Maybe that's what's kept me alive.

YASHA. You're a nuisance, grandad. (*Yawning.*) It's time for you to peg out.

FEERS. Ah! You . . . good-for-nothing. (*He mumbles to himself.*)

Trofimov and Ranevskaya dance in the drawing-room, and then come dancing into the sitting-room

RANEVSKAYA. Merci. I'll sit down. (*She sits.*) I'm tired.

Anya comes in

ANYA (*excitedly*). There was a man in the kitchen who said that the cherry orchard was sold today.

RANEVSKAYA. Sold? Who to?

ANYA. He didn't say. He's gone.

She dances with Trofimov. Both dance off into the drawing-room

YASHA. It was some old fellow chattering—a stranger.

FEERS. Master isn't back yet, and he's wearing his light overcoat. He'll catch cold as like as not. Ah, young wood, green wood!

RANEVSKAYA. This is killing me. Yasha, go and find out who it was sold to.

YASHA. Why, the old man's gone long ago. (*He laughs.*)

RANEVSKAYA (*somewhat vexed*). What are you laughing at? What are you so glad about?

YASHA. He's a funny fellow, is Yepikhodov. A silly chap, Twenty-Two Misfortunes!

RANEVSKAYA. Feers, where will you go if the estate is sold?

FEERS. I'll go where you tell me to.

RANEVSKAYA. What's wrong with you? You look ill. You ought to be in bed.

FEERS (*ironically*). Oh yes, I'll go to bed, but who will hand the things round and give orders? There's no one else in the whole house.



DUNYASHA. What is it you want?

YEPIKHODOV. Undoubtedly, perhaps, you are right. (*Sighing.*) But of course, if one regards it from the point of view, if I may allow myself the expression, and with apologies for my frankness, you have finally reduced me to a state of mind. I quite appreciate my destiny; every day some misfortune happens to me, and I have long since grown accustomed to it, and face my fortune with a smile. You have passed your word to me, and although I—

DUNYASHA. Let us talk of this some other time, if you don't mind, but now leave me alone. I am busy meditating. (*Toying with her fan.*)

YEPIKHODOV. Every day some misfortune befalls me, and yet, if I may venture to say so, I meet them with smiles and even laughter.

Varya comes in from the drawing-room

VARYA (*to Yepikhodov*). Are you still here, Semyon? You seem to pay no attention to what you're told. (*To Dunyasha.*) Go along, Dunyasha. (*To Yepikhodov.*) First you play billiards and break a cue, and then you march about the drawing-room as if you were a guest!

YEPIKHODOV. You really cannot, if I may so express myself, call me to account.

VARYA. I'm not calling you to account, I'm just telling you. All you can do is walk about, without ever doing any work; and why on earth we keep a clerk at all Heaven only knows.

YEPIKHODOV (*offended*). Whether I work, or walk, or eat, or play billiards is a question to be decided only by my elders and people who understand.

VARYA. You dare to talk to me like that! (*Flaring up.*) You dare! So I don't understand, do I? You get out of here this minute! Do you hear me? This minute!

YEPIKHODOV (*cowed*). I must beg you to express yourself in gentler language.

VARYA (*beside herself*). You get out this very instant. Out you go! (*Following him as he backs towards the door.*) Twenty-Two Misfortunes! Get out and stay out! Don't let me put eyes on you here again!



vies and Black Sea herrings. I've had nothing all day. Lord, what I've been through! (*Through the open door of the billiard-room come the click of the billiard balls and Yasha's voice: "Seven, eighteen!" Gayev's expression changes; he stops crying.*) I'm frightfully tired. Come and help me change, Feers. (*He goes across the drawing-room to his own room, Feers following.*)

PISHCHIK. What about the sale? Come!

RANEVSKAYA. Is the orchard sold?

LOPAKHIN. Yes.

RANEVSKAYA. Who bought it?

LOPAKHIN. I did. (*Pause.*) (*Ranevskaya is overwhelmed at the news. She would have fallen but for the chair and table by her. Varya takes the keys from her waistband, throws them on the floor in the middle of the room, and goes out.*) I bought it. Wait a bit, don't rush me, my head's in a whirl—I can't speak. (*Laughing.*) When we got to the sale, Deriganov was there already. Mr Gayev had only 15,000, and Deriganov bid 30,000 over and above the mortgage, straight off. Well—I went for him and bid 40,000. He bid 45,000. I said 55,000, and so we went on, he going up by 5 thousands and me by ten. Well, and so it ended. I bid 90 over the mortgage, and it was knocked down to me. Now the cherry orchard's mine! Mine! (*He bursts out laughing.*) God in heaven! The cherry orchard is mine! Tell me that I'm drunk, that I'm off my head, that it's all a dream. (*Stamping his feet.*) Don't laugh at me! If only my father and my grandfather could rise from their graves and see it all! How their Yermolai—their beaten and ignorant Yermolai, who used to run about barefoot in the winter—how this same Yermolai had bought the finest estate in the world! I have bought the estate where my father and grandfather were slaves, where they weren't even allowed into the kitchen. I'm asleep, it's only a dream, it isn't real. . . . It's my imagination, wrapped in the mists of ignorance. (*He picks up the keys, smiling affectionately.*) She's thrown down the keys to show she's no longer mistress here. (*Jingling them.*) Well, never mind. (*The musicians are heard tuning up.*) Hey, musicians, play! I want to hear you. Come, all of you, and see Yermolai Lopakhin take his axe to



the cherry orchard, come and see the trees fall down! We'll build cottages here and our grandsons and great-grandsons shall see a new life. Strike up, music! *(The band plays. Ranevskaya sinks into a chair and weeps bitterly.)*

LOPAKHIN *(reproachfully)*. Oh, why, why didn't you listen to me? You can't get it back now, you poor dear. *(With tears.)* Oh, that all this were past and over! That our miserable topsy-turvy life were changed!

PISHCHIK *(taking him by the arm, in an undertone)*. She's crying. Let's go into the drawing-room and leave her alone. Come on. *(Holding him by the arm and going up towards the drawing-room.)*

LOPAKHIN. What's the matter? Play your best, musicians! Let everything be as I wish. *(Ironically.)* Here comes the new landowner, the owner of the cherry orchard! *(Knocking up by accident against a table and nearly upsetting the candelabra.)* Never mind, I can pay for everything!

He goes out with Pishchik. Nobody remains on the stage or in the drawing-room except Ranevskaya, who sits huddled up weeping bitterly. The band plays softly. Anya and Trofimov come in quickly. Anya goes to her mother and kneels before her. Trofimov stands at the entrance to the drawing-room

ANYA. Mamma! Are you crying, Mamma? My dear, good, sweet Mamma! Darling, I love you! I bless you! The cherry orchard is sold, it's gone, that's quite true, quite true. But don't cry, Mamma! You've still got life before you, you've still got your good and pure soul. Come with me, darling—let's go away from here. We'll plant a new garden, lovelier than this. You will see it, you'll understand, and happiness, deep, quite happiness, will descend on your soul, like the sun at dusk, and you'll smile, Mamma. Come, darling, come with me!

*Curtain*

## ACT FOUR

Same scene as in Act One. There are neither window-curtains nor pictures. The little furniture left is piled up in a corner, as if for sale. A feeling of desolation. By the outer door and in the background of the scene are trunks, travelling bags, etc. On the left the door is

open and the voices of Varya and Anya are audible. Lopakhin stands waiting. Yasha holds a tray with wine-glasses filled with champagne. Yepikhodov is tying up a box in the ante-room. A hum of voices behind the scene; the peasants have come to say good-bye

GAYEV (*off-stage*). Thank you, my lads, thank you.

YASHA. The common people have come to say good-bye. I'm of the opinion, Mr Lopakhin, that they're good people but rather ignorant.

The hubbub of voices dies away. Ranevskaya and Gayev come in from the ante-room. She is not crying, but she is pale, her cheeks are quivering—she cannot speak

GAYEV. You gave them your purse, Lyuba. You oughtn't to have done that, really.

RANEVSKAYA. I couldn't help it, I couldn't. (*Both go out.*)

LOPAKHIN (*calling after them through the doorway*). Will you have a glass at parting? Please! Just a glass. I forgot to bring any from the town, and could only get one bottle at the station. Do come. (*Pause.*) What, you won't have any? (*Returning from the door.*) If I'd known, I wouldn't have bought it. Then I shan't have any either. (*Yasha sets the tray down carefully on a chair.*) Drink it yourself, Yasha.

YASHA. Here's to our departure! Good luck to them that stay! (*Drinking.*) This isn't real champagne, you take my word for it.

LOPAKHIN. Eight roubles a bottle. (*Pause.*) It's devilish cold in here.

YASHA. We haven't heated the stoves today since we're all going away. (*He laughs.*)

LOPAKHIN. Why are you laughing?

YASHA. Just pleasure.

LOPAKHIN. Here we are in October, yet it's as calm and sunny as in summer. Fine building weather. (*Calls out looking at his watch.*) Don't forget that there's only forty-seven minutes left before the train goes. You must start for the station in twenty minutes. Hurry up.

Trofimov comes in, in an overcoat, from out of doors

TROFIMOV. I think it's time to start. The carriages are here. What the deuce has become of my galoshes? I've

lost them. (*Calling out.*) Anya, my galoshes aren't here. I can't find them!

LOPAKHIN. I've got to go to Kharkov. I'm going in the same train with you. I'll spend the winter in Kharkov. I've been loafing about all this time with you people, and fretting for want of work. I can't live without work, I don't know what to do with my hands—they dangle about as if they didn't belong to me.

TROFIMOV. Well, we're leaving now, and you'll be able to get back to your beneficent labours.

LOPAKHIN. Have a glass.

TROFIMOV. No, thanks.

LOPAKHIN. Well, so you're off to Moscow?

TROFIMOV. Yes, I'll see them into town, and go to Moscow tomorrow.

LOPAKHIN. Well, well, I suppose the professors haven't started their lectures yet, they're waiting for you to arrive.

TROFIMOV. That's no concern of yours.

LOPAKHIN. How many years have you been up at the University?

TROFIMOV. Try and think of some new joke—this one's flat and stale. (*Looking for his galoshes.*) Look here, I suppose we shan't meet again, so let me give you a bit of advice as a keepsake: Don't flap your hands about! Get out of that habit. Building cottages, prophesying that summer residents will become small free-holders, is also a sort of hand-flapping. Well, when all's said and done, I like you. You have thin, delicate fingers, like an artist's, you have a fine, delicate soul.

LOPAKHIN (*embracing him*). Good-bye, my dear boy. Thank you for everything. Take some money from me for the journey if you want it.

TROFIMOV. What for? I don't want it.

LOPAKHIN. But you haven't got any.

TROFIMOV. Yes, I have. Many thanks. I got some for a translation. Here it is, in my pocket. (*Anxiously.*) I can't find my galoshes anywhere!

VARYA (*from the next room*). Here, take your garbage away. (*She flings a pair of galoshes on the stage.*)

TROFIMOV. What are you so cross about, Varya? Humph! . . . But these aren't my galoshes!

LOPAKHIN. I sowed three thousand acres of poppy last spring and cleared forty thousand profit. What a picture they made, those poppies in flower! As I was saying, I've made forty thousand, and I'm offering you some because I can afford to. What's the good of putting on airs? I'm a peasant. . . . As man to man. . . .

TROFIMOV. Your father was a peasant, mine was a chemist—but that proves nothing whatever. (*Lopakhin takes out his wallet.*) Put that away. If you offered me two hundred thousand I wouldn't take it. I am a free man, and nothing that you prize so highly, all of you, rich and poor alike, has the least power over me—to me it's like thistle-down floating on the wind. I can do without you—I can go past you, I'm strong and proud. I'm in the foremost ranks of mankind which is advancing towards the highest truth, the highest happiness possible on earth.

LOPAKHIN. Will you get there?

TROFIMOV. Yes. (*Pause.*) I will get there myself, or I will show others the way.

The sound of axes at work is heard in the distance

LOPAKHIN. Well, good-bye, old chap; it is time to start. Here we stand swaggering to each other, and life goes on while we're at it. When I work for hours without getting tired, I am easy in my mind and I seem to know why I exist. But God alone knows what most of the people in Russia were born for. Well, who cares? It doesn't affect the circulation of work, as they say. I hear Mr Gayev has accepted a situation at a bank—6,000 roubles a year. He won't stick it out, though, he's too lazy.

ANYA (*in the doorway*). Mamma says, will you stop chopping down the orchard till she's gone.

TROFIMOV. Really, you might have had that much tact. (*He goes off to the ante-room.*)

LOPAKHIN. Of course. I'll stop them at once. What fools! (*He goes out.*)

ANYA. Has Feers been sent to the hospital?

YASHA. I told them this morning. They must have sent him.

ANYA (*to Yepikhodov, who crosses the drawing-room*). Please find out if Feers has been sent to the hospital.

YASHA (*offended*). I told Yegor this morning. What's the good of asking a dozen times?

YEPIKHODOV. Old Feers, in my conclusive opinion, is hardly worth tinkering up; it's time he was dispatched to his forefathers. I can only say I envy him. (*Putting down a suitcase on a bandbox and crushing it flat.*) There you are! I knew how it would be! (*He goes out.*)

YASHA (*jeering*). Twenty-Two Misfortunes!

VARYA (*off-stage*). Has Feers been sent to the hospital?

ANYA. Yes.

VARYA. Why didn't they take the note to the doctor?

ANYA. Then we must send it after them. (*She goes out.*)

VARYA (*from the adjoining room*). Where's Yasha? Tell him his mother's come to say good-bye to him.

YASHA (*with a gesture of impatience*). This is enough to try anybody's patience.

Dunyasha has been busying herself with the luggage. Seeing Yasha, alone, she approaches him

DUNYASHA. You might just give me one glance, Yasha. You are going away—leaving me. (*Crying and throwing her arms round his neck.*)

YASHA. What's the good of crying? (*He drinks the champagne.*) In six days I shall be back in Paris. Tomorrow we take the express and off we go. I can hardly believe it. Vive la France! This place doesn't suit me. I can't stomach it . . . it can't be helped. I've seen enough ignorance here—I'm fed up. (*Drinking champagne.*) What's the good of crying? Behave yourself properly, and you'll have no call to cry.

DUNYASHA (*she powders her face, looking into a pocket-mirror*). Send me a letter from Paris. I've been so fond of you, Yasha, so fond! I am a delicate creature, Yasha.

YASHA. Here's somebody coming. (*He busies himself with the luggage, singing under his breath.*)

Ranevskaya, Gayev, Anya and Charlotta come in

GAYEV. Shall we start? It's nearly time. (*Looking at Yasha.*) Who is it smells of herring?

RANEVSKAYA. We must take our seats in ten minutes. (*Looking round the room.*) Good-bye, dear old house, our old grandad! When winter is past and spring comes again, you will be here no more; they will have pulled you down. Oh, think of all these walls have seen! (*Kissing Anya passionately.*) My treasure, you look radiant, your eyes flash like two diamonds. Are you glad? Very glad?

ANYA. Yes. We're beginning a new life, Mamma.

GAYEV (*gaily*). She's quite right, everything's all right now. Before the cherry orchard was sold we were all worried and miserable; but once the thing was settled finally and irrevocably, we all calmed down and even felt cheerful. I'm a bank clerk now, a financier . . . cannon off the red! And you, Lyuba, whatever you may say, you're looking ever so much better, not a doubt about it.

RANEVSKAYA. Yes, my nerves are better, that's true. (*She is helped on with her hat and coat.*) I sleep well now. Take my things out, Yasha. We must be off. (*To Anya.*) We shall meet again, darling . . . I'm off to Paris; I can live on the money your grandmother sent from Yaroslavl to buy the property. God bless your grandmother! Only I'm afraid the money won't last long.

ANYA. You'll come back very, very soon, won't you, Mamma? I'm going to take my examination at high school and then set to work and help you. We'll read all sorts of books together, won't we, Mamma? (*Kissing her mother's hands.*) We'll read in the long autumn evenings, we'll read heaps of books, and a new, wonderful world will open before us. (*Musingly.*) Come soon, Mamma!

RANEVSKAYA. I will, my angel. (*Embracing her.*)

Lopakhin comes in. Charlotta hums a song

GAYEV. Happy Charlotta, she's singing.

CHARLOTTA (*taking a bundle which looks like a swaddled baby*). Hushabye, my baby. . . (*The baby answers, "Wah-wah."*) Hush, my little one, hush, hush, my

pretty one! ("Wah, Wah.") You'll break your mother's heart. (*She throws the bundle down on the floor again.*) Don't forget to find me a new place, please. I can't go on like this.

LOPAKHIN. We'll find you one, Charlotta, don't you worry.

GAYEV. Everybody's deserting us. Varya's going, too. We've suddenly grown useless.

CHARLOTTA. There's no place where I can live in town. I have to go. (*She hums.*) What do I care?

Pishchik comes in

LOPAKHIN. Nature's masterpiece!

PISHCHIK (*panting*). Oh! ... Let me catch my breath! I'm all done up! ... My noble friends! Give me some water.

GAYEV. Want some money, I suppose? No, thank you; I'll keep out of harm's way. (*He goes out.*)

PISHCHIK. It's ages since I was last here, fairest lady. (*To Lopakhin.*) You here? Glad to see you, you man of giant intellect. Take ... here. (*Giving Lopakhin money.*) Four hundred roubles. That leaves me owing you eight hundred and forty.

LOPAKHIN (*amazed, shrugging his shoulders*). It's like a thing in a dream! Where did you get it from?

PISHCHIK. Wait a bit ... I'm hot. ... A most extraordinary thing. Some Englishmen came along and found a sort of white clay on my land. (*To Ranevskaya.*) And here's four hundred for you, lovely, wonderful lady. (*He gives her money.*) The rest another time. (*Drinking water.*) A young man in the train was saying just now that ... some great philosopher advises us all to jump off house tops. Jump, he says, that's the clue to life. (*With an astonished air.*) Fancy that! More water!

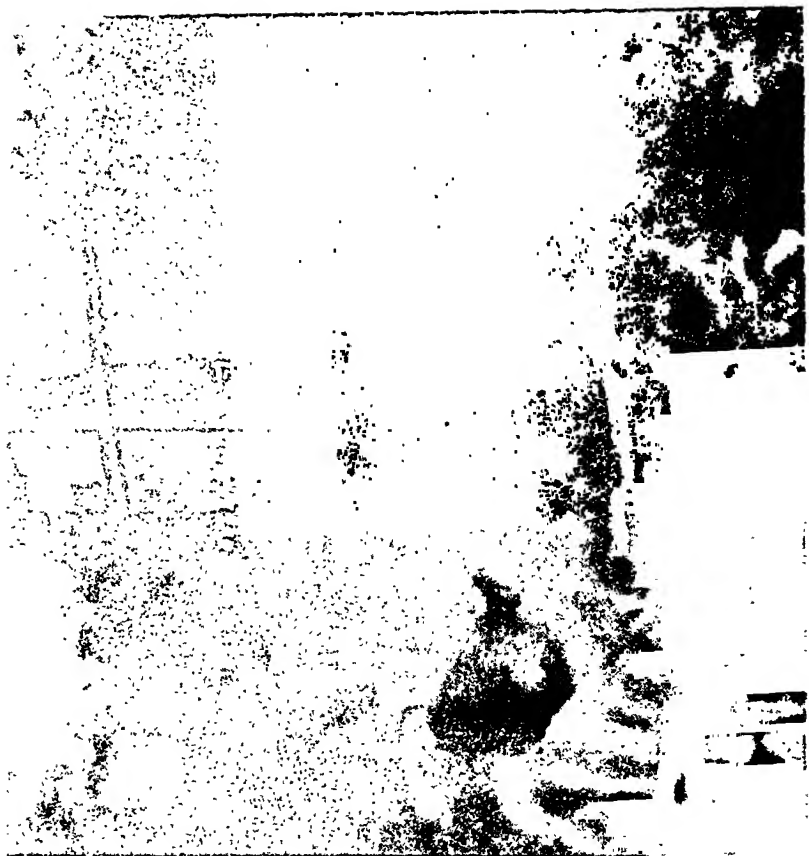
LOPAKHIN. Who were the Englishmen?

PISHCHIK. I leased them the plot with the clay in it for twenty-four years. And now, you'll excuse me ... I must be trotting on. I'm going to Znoikov's, to Kardamonov's ... I owe everybody money. (*Drinking.*) Good-bye to everyone, I'll drop in on Thursday.







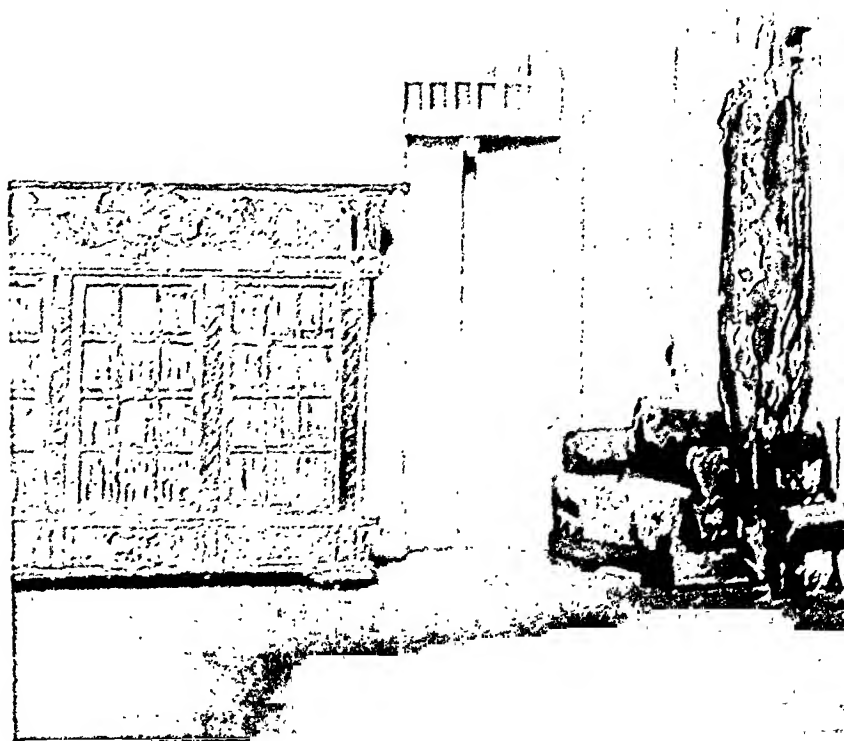


V. A. Simov's sketch for the set in Act I of  
the 1899 production of *The Seagull*





V. A. Simov's sketch for the set in Act IV  
of *The Three Sisters*





V. A. Simov's sketch for the set in Act I of  
*The Cherry Orchard*



RANEVSKAYA. We're just moving into town, and tomorrow I go abroad.

PISHCHIK. What! (*Alarmed.*) You moving into town? Oh, I see—the furniture, trunks. . . . It can't be helped. (*Through his tears.*) It cannot be helped. People of powerful intellect, those Englishmen. It's all right. Be happy. God help you . . . it's all right. Everything in this world must come to an end. (*He kisses Ranevskaya's hand.*) If ever the news reaches you that I have come to an end, give a thought to the old . . . horse here, and say, "Once there lived a certain Simeonov-Pishchik, God rest his soul." Wonderful weather we're having. . . . Yes. (*He goes out, deeply moved, but returns at once and says from the doorway.*) Dashenka sent her compliments. (*He goes out.*)

RANEVSKAYA. Now we can go. I have only two things on my mind. One is poor old Feers. (*Looking at her watch.*) We can still stay five minutes.

ANYA. Feers has been sent to the hospital already, Mamma. Yasha sent him off this morning.

RANEVSKAYA. My other anxiety is Varya. She's used to getting up early and working, and now that she has no work to do she's like a fish out of water. She has grown thin and pale and taken to crying, poor dear. (*Pause.*) You know very well, Yermolai, I always hoped to see her married to you, and everything seemed to point to your getting married. (*She whispers to Anya, who nods to Charlotta, and both go out.*) She loves you—you like her. And I can't make out why you seem to fight shy of each other. I can't understand it!

LOPAKHIN. I don't understand it either, to tell you the truth. It all seems so odd. I'm ready. . . . If there's still time, let's settle it; straight off and have done with it; without you there, I feel as if I should never propose to her.

RANEVSKAYA. Splendid! After all, it shouldn't take more than a minute. I'll call her at once.

LOPAKHIN. And here's the champagne all ready. (*Looking at the glasses.*) Empty! Someone's drunk it. (*Yasha coughs.*) That's what they call lapping it up and no mistake!



RANEVSKAYA (*animated*). Capital! We'll all go away. . . . Allez, Yasha. I'll call her. (*At the door.*) Varya, leave all that and come here. Come along! (*She goes out with Yasha.*)

LOPAKHIN (*looking at his watch*). Ahem. (*Pause.*)

A stifled laugh and whispering behind the door; at last Varya comes in

VARYA (*examining the luggage at great length*). It's very odd, I can't find it anywhere.

LOPAKHIN. What are you looking for?

VARYA. I packed it myself, and can't remember. (*Pause.*)

LOPAKHIN. Where are you going now, Miss Varya?

VARYA. Me? I'm going to the Ragulins'. They've engaged me to keep house for them—to be housekeeper, or something like that.

LOPAKHIN. Oh, at Yashnevo? That's about fifty miles from here. (*Pause.*) Well, so life in this house is over now.

VARYA (*examining the luggage*). Wherever can it be? Perhaps I put it in the trunk. Yes, life here is over—there will be no more of it.

LOPAKHIN. And I'm off to Kharkov now—by the same train. A lot of business to do. I'm leaving Yepikhodov to look after the place. I've taken him on.

VARYA. Have you?

LOPAKHIN. This time last year we had snow already, if you remember; but now it's fine and sunny. Still it's cold for all that. Three degrees below.

VARYA. Really? I didn't look. (*Pause.*) And then the thermometer is broken. (*Pause.*)

A VOICE (*at the door from the yard*). Mr Lopakhin!

LOPAKHIN (*as if he had only been waiting to be called*). Coming! (*He goes out quickly.*)

Varya sits on the floor, puts her head on a bundle, and sobs softly.  
The door opens, and Ranevskaya comes in cautiously

RANEVSKAYA. Well? (*Pause.*) We must be off.

VARYA (*she has wiped her eyes and is no longer crying*). Yes, it's time, Mother. I shall get to the Ragulins' today, if I don't miss the train.

RANEVSKAYA (*calling out*). Put on your things, Anya.

Enter Anya, then Gayev and Charlotta. Gayev wears a warm overcoat with a hood. The servants and drivers come in. Yepikhodov bustles about the luggage.

RANEVSKAYA. Now we can start.

ANYA (*delighted*). We can start!

GAYEV. My friends, my dear, precious friends! Now that I am leaving this house for ever, can I keep quiet? Can I help expressing the emotions that fill my whole being now?

ANYA (*pleadingly*). Uncle!

VARYA. Uncle, please!

GAYEV (*sadly*). Cannon off the red. I'll hold my tongue.

Enter Trofimov, then Lopakhin

TROFIMOV. Come along, it's time to start.

LOPAKHIN. Yepikhodov, my coat.

RANEVSKAYA. I must stay here another minute. I feel as if I had never noticed before what the walls and ceilings of the house were like and now I look at them greedily, with such tender love.

GAYEV. I remember, when I was six years old, how I sat on this window-sill on Trinity Sunday, watching father going to church.

RANEVSKAYA. Has everything been taken?

LOPAKHIN. I think so. (*To Yepikhodov, putting on his overcoat.*) See that everything's in order, Yepikhodov.

YEPIKHODOV (*in a husky voice*). You can trust me, Mr Lopakhin.

LOPAKHIN. What's wrong with your voice?

YEPIKHODOV. I was taking a drink of water and I swallowed something.

YASHA (*contemptuously*). What ignorance!

RANEVSKAYA. We're going—and there won't be a soul left here.

LOPAKHIN. Not until spring.

Varya pulls an umbrella out of a bundle so violently that it looks as if she wanted to hit somebody. Lopakhin pretends to be frightened

VARYA. What an idea. I'd never have thought of such a thing.

TROFIMOV. Come, we'd better take our places. It's time. The train will be in immediately.

VARYA. There are your galoshes, Petya, by that box. (*With tears.*) What dirty old things they are!

TROFIMOV (*putting on his galoshes*). Come along, friends.

GAYEV (*much moved, afraid of crying.*) The train—the station. Cannon off the red doublet to pot the white into the corner.

RANEVSKAYA. Let's go!

LOPAKHIN. Is everyone here? No one left behind? (*Locking the door left.*) There are things stacked in there. I must lock them up. Come on!

ANYA. Good-bye, house! Good-bye, old life!

TROFIMOV. Welcome, new life! (*He goes out with Anya.*)

Varya looks round the room, and goes out slowly. Yasha and Charlotta, with her dog, go out

LOPAKHIN. Till the spring, then. Go on, everybody. So long! (*He goes out.*)

Ranevskaya and Gayev remain alone. They seem to have been waiting for this moment; they throw their arms round each other's necks and sob restrainedly and quietly, afraid of being overheard

GAYEV (*in despair*). My sister! My sister!

RANEVSKAYA. Oh, my dear orchard! My sweet lovely orchard! My life, my youth, my happiness, good-bye! Good-bye!

ANYA (*calling gaily off-stage*). Mother!

TROFIMOV (*gaily, excitedly*). Halloo!

RANEVSKAYA. One last look at the walls and the windows. Our dear mother used to walk in this room.

GAYEV. My sister! My sister!

ANYA (*off-stage*). Mother!

TROFIMOV (*off-stage*). Halloo!

RANEVSKAYA. Coming! (*They go out.*)

The stage is empty. There is the sound of the doors being locked up, and the carriages driving away. It grows quiet. Through the silence

one can hear the sad and lonely thud of an axe on a tree. Footsteps are heard. Feers appears in the doorway right. He is dressed, as always, in his long coat and white waistcoat, with slippers on his feet. He is ill

FEERS (*going to the door and trying the handle*). Locked. They've gone. (*Sitting down on the sofa*.) They've forgotten me. Never mind! I'll sit here a bit. Master is sure to have put on his cloth overcoat instead of his fur. (*He sighs anxiously*.) He hadn't me to see. Young wood, green wood! (*He mumbles incoherently*.) Life has gone by as if I'd never lived. (*Lying down*.) I'll lie down a bit. There's no strength left in you, none at all. Ah, you ... good-for-nothing! (*He lies motionless*.)

A distant sound is heard that seems to come from the sky, like that of a string snapping—dying away, melancholy. All is still again save the sound of the axe far away in the orchard

### *Curtain*

1904

# THE BEAR

*A one-act farce*

Dedicated to N. N. Solovtsov

## CHARACTERS

ELENA POPOVA, a dimple-checked widow

GRIGORY SMIRNOV, a not-too-old country gentleman

LUKA, Popova's old manservant

The drawing-room in Mrs Popova's country-house

## I

Mrs Popova dressed in deep mourning and gazing at a photograph  
and Luka

LUKA. It's not right, Ma'am. You'll do yourself no end of harm. Cook and chambermaid are out berry-picking, every living creature's enjoying itself, even the cat's having a good time, prancing about in the yard and chasing the dicky birds, but you just keep yourself caged up indoors all day as if you were in a nunnery. It's almost a year since you last went out of the house!

POPOVA. I shall never go out again. Why should I? My life is over. He is in his grave and I have buried myself within these four walls. We are both dead.

LUKA. There you go again! That's a fine way to talk! The master's no more, God rest his soul. The good Lord has seen fit to take him away. But you can't go on weeping and wearing black forever. My old missus passed away as well, you know. So what did I do? Mourned her for a month or two, then called it a day. The old girl wasn't worth any more moaning and groaning than that (*sighs*). You never see anything of the neighbours. Don't go to visit them and won't have them here. Pardon me, Ma'am, but we live like spiders—never see the light of

day. The mice have even nibbled holes in my uniform. It's not as if there weren't any nice folk around. The place is full of them. There's a regiment stationed at Ryblovo—strapping young officers, a real sight for sore eyes. Dances every Friday night at the barracks and a brass band playing every day. . . . Fair breaks my heart, Ma'am! There you are—a fine, handsome young woman, all peaches and cream,—could be having the time of your life. Beauty don't last forever, you know. Ten years from now you'll be wanting to catch the officers' eyes and twist the men round your little finger, but it'll be too late.

POPOVA (*firmly*). Kindly never say such things to me again, Luka. You know perfectly well that life lost all meaning for me when the master died. You think I am still alive, but you're wrong. I have sworn never to discard this mourning and never again to see the light of day. Do you hear? May his spirit see how I love him. Yes, I know it's no secret to you that he was often unfair to me, cruel, even . . . unfaithful. But I shall be faithful to him to the grave. I'll show him how strongly I can love. Over there, on the other side, he will see me as I was before his death. . . .

LUKA. Instead of talking like that you'd do better to go for a nice walk in the garden or get Toby or Giant harnessed and drive round to the neighbours. . . .

POPOVA. Oh, dear! (*Starts crying*.)

LUKA. Oh, don't do that, Ma'am! There, there. God bless you.

POPOVA. He was so fond of Toby. He always took him when he visited the Korchagins or the Vlassovs. How wonderfully he used to drive. What a fine figure he made when he drew in the reins with a flourish. Do you remember? Tell them to give Toby an extra bag of oats today.

LUKA. Yes, Ma'am.

A loud ring at the door

POPOVA (*starting up*). Who can that be? Tell them I'm not receiving anyone.

LUKA. Very well, Ma'am. (*Exit.*)

## II

Mrs Popova alone

POPOVA (*looking at the photograph*). You'll see how well I can love and forgive, mon cher Nicolas. My love shall not die until I do, until this poor heart stops beating. (*Laughing through her tears.*) Aren't you ashamed of yourself? Here am I, such a good girl, such a faithful little wife, who's locked herself up and will be true to you to the grave. But you ... aren't you ashamed of yourself, tubby-kins? Deceiving me, making scenes, leaving me all alone for weeks on end. ...

## III

Mrs Popova and Luka

LUKA (*enters, worried*). It's someone asking for you, Madam. Wants to see. ...

POPOVA. Didn't you say that I haven't seen anyone since my husband died?

LUKA. Yes, but he wouldn't listen. Says it's very important.

POPOVA. I won't see *an-y-bo-dy*!

LUKA. I told him, but ... he's a proper devil ... swore and pushed past me into the dining room ... that's where he is now. ...

POPOVA (*annoyed*). Alright, show him in. How rude people are!

Exit Luka

POPOVA. How difficult they are! What do they want from me? Why won't they leave me alone? (*Sighs.*) I see I really shall have to get me to a nunnery. (*Thinks.*) Yes, a nunnery. ...

## IV

Mrs Popova, Luka and Grigory Smirnov

SMIRNOV (*enters and addresses Luka*). Blockhead! Just mind what you're saying! Silly ass! (*Sees Popova and*

*assumes a dignified manner.*) Allow me to introduce myself, Madam. Grigory Smirnov, retired artillery lieutenant. I am compelled to trouble you on an extremely important matter.

POPOVA (*not offering her hand*). What do you want?

SMIRNOV. Your late husband, with whom I had the honour of being acquainted, owed me twelve hundred roubles on two bills of exchange. As I have to pay interest to the Land Bank tomorrow, I should be grateful if you could return the money today.

POPOVA. Twelve hundred! What did my husband owe you for?

SMIRNOV. He used to buy oats from me.

POPOVA (*sighing*). Don't forget to tell them to give Toby that extra bag of oats today, Luka. (*Luka goes out.*) If my husband owed you money I shall pay it, of course, but I must ask you to excuse me, because I have no ready money today. My bailiff is due back from town the day after tomorrow and I shall ask him to pay you whatever is owing, but for the time being I cannot comply with your request. Moreover, it is exactly seven months today since my dear husband died, and in my present state of mind I do not feel at all disposed to deal with money matters.

SMIRNOV. And in my present state of mind if I don't pay the interest tomorrow I'll be ruined, thrown out by the scruff of my neck. They'll confiscate my estate.

POPOVA. You'll get the money the day after tomorrow.

SMIRNOV. I need it today.

POPOVA. I'm sorry, but I cannot pay you today.

SMIRNOV. And I'm sorry, but I can't wait until the day after tomorrow.

POPOVA. What can I do if I haven't the money now?

SMIRNOV. So you can't pay me?

POPOVA. No, I can't.

SMIRNOV. Hm. . . . Is that your last word?

POPOVA. Yes, it is.

SMIRNOV. Positively your last word?

POPOVA. Positively my last word.



SMIRNOV. Most obliged to you. We'll make a note of that! (*Shrugs his shoulders.*) And they wonder why I'm not cool and collected. I meet the excise officer just now, on the way here, and he asks me why I'm always in such a bad temper. Heaven help me, how can I help being so bad-tempered? I'm desperately in need of money. I leave home yesterday morning at the crack of dawn, do the rounds of all my creditors, and not a single one of them coughs up! I get dog-tired and spend the night sleeping by a vodka barrel in some flea-bitten hole of a place. Then finally I arrive here, forty miles from home, hoping to get my money, and I'm treated to a "state of mind"! How can I help being so bad-tempered?

POPOVA. I thought I had made myself quite clear. You will get your money when my bailiff returns from town.

SMIRNOV. I came to see you, not your bailiff! What the devil, pardon my language, do I want with your bailiff?

POPOVA. Forgive me, sir, but I'm not used to such language or to such a tone. I can listen to you no longer. (*Exit quickly.*)

## V

### Smirnov alone

SMIRNOV. I like that! "State of mind"! Her husband died seven months ago today! Have I got to pay that interest or haven't I? I ask you: have I, or haven't I? Alright, so your husband's died and you're in a state and all that, and your bailiff's gone off somewhere, damn his eyes, but what am I supposed to do? Fly away from my creditors on a magic carpet? Or bang my head against a brick wall? I go to see Gruzdev and he's not at home. Yaroshevich has gone into hiding. I have the devil of a row with Kuritsin and nearly throw him out of the window. Mazutov has got a stomach upset and this one's

"in a state". Not one of the bastards will pay up. And all because I'm too soft with them, like a sloppy old woman. I'm too considerate. Well, just you wait! I'll show you! I won't let you play around with me, damn you! Here I am and here I stay, until she pays me. Phew! What a temper I'm in today. I'm shaking with rage, choking with it. It's made me feel quite ill! (*Calls out.*) Hey, there!

## VI

Smirnov and Luka

LUKA (*enters*). What do you want?

SMIRNOV. Bring me some kvass or water.

Exit Luka

SMIRNOV. The logic of it! A man needs money so desperately he'd almost hang himself, and she won't pay because she doesn't feel like dealing with money matters, if you please. Typical female logic! Never did like talking to women and never will. Rather sit on a keg of gunpowder than talk to a woman. Brrr! That bunch of petticoats has got me in such a rage, I'm shaking all over. Only have to catch sight of one of those poetic creatures and it makes me so angry that I get all wobbly at the ankles. It's enough to make you shout for help.

## VII

Smirnov and Luka

LUKA (*enters and serves him with the water.*) Madam is indisposed and is not seeing anyone.

SMIRNOV. Get out, blast you!

Exit Luka

SMIRNOV. Indisposed and not seeing anyone! Alright, don't see me! I'll just stay here until you pay me the money.

If you're indisposed for a week, I'll stay for a week. If it's a year, I'll stay a year. I'll show you, old girl. You won't get round me with your black dress and your dimples. We know all about those dimples! (*Shouts through the window.*) Unharness the horses, Semyon! We won't be leaving for a while. I'm staying here. Tell them in the stables to give the horses some oats. You stupid lout, that one's got caught up in the reins again. (*Mimics him.*) "Doesn't matter!" I'll give you "doesn't matter"! (*Goes away from the window.*) It's sickening. . . . This unbearable heat, no one paying up, a sleepless night, and now this bunch of petticoats in mourning with her "states". I've got a headache. Perhaps I need a drop of vodka? Why not? (*Calls out.*) Hey, there!

LUKA (*enters*). What do you want?

SMIRNOV. Bring me a glass of vodka.

Exit Luka

SMIRNOV. Ugh. (*Sits down and inspects himself.*) A pretty sight, I must say. Covered with dust, filthy boots, unwashed, hair in an awful mess, and bits of straw all over my waistcoat. The little lady must have taken me for a real brigand. (*Yawns.*) Not very *comme il faut* to turn up in someone's drawing room looking like this. Still never mind . . . I'm a creditor here, not a guest. There's no special etiquette for creditors.

LUKA (*enters and serves him with vodka*). You're taking a bit of a liberty, sir.

SMIRNOV (*angrily*). What's that?

LUKA. Er . . . nothing, sir . . . I just. . . .

SMIRNOV. Who do you think you're talking to! Shut up!

LUKA (*aside*). We're got landed with a nasty piece of work here. Straight from the devil himself.

Exit Luka

SMIRNOV. Oh, what a rage I'm in. I could smash the whole world to smithereens. I feel quite ill . . . (*Shouts out.*) Hey there!

## VIII

Mrs Popova and Smirnov

POPOVA (*enters with eyes downcast.*) Sir, in my solitude I have grown unaccustomed to people's voices and cannot endure shouting. I beg you most earnestly not to disturb me.

SMIRNOV. Pay me the money and I'll go.

POPOVA. I've told you in plain language: I haven't got any ready money at the moment. Wait until the day after tomorrow.

SMIRNOV. I also had the honour of telling you in plain language: I need the money today, not the day after tomorrow. If you don't pay me today, I shall have to hang myself tomorrow.

POPOVA. But what can I do, if I haven't the money? How strange you are!

SMIRNOV. So you won't pay me now, eh?

POPOVA. I can't.

SMIRNOV. In that case I'll stay here until you can. (*Sits down.*) You'll pay me the day after tomorrow, eh? That's fine. Then I'll stay here like this until the day after tomorrow. Just sitting here like this . . . (*Jumps up.*) I ask you: do I have to pay the interest tomorrow, or don't I? Perhaps you think I'm joking?

POPOVA. I beg you not to shout, sir. This isn't a stable.

SMIRNOV. I'm not asking you about a stable, I'm asking you whether I have to pay the interest tomorrow, or not?

POPOVA. You don't know how to behave in the company of a lady.

SMIRNOV. Oh yes, I do know how to behave in the company of a lady.

POPOVA. No, you don't. You're coarse and bad-mannered. Respectable people don't talk to a lady like that.

SMIRNOV. Well, this is a surprise! How would you like me to talk to you then? In French? (*Angrily and affectedly.*) *Madame, je vous prie* . . . how delighted I am that you won't pay me back my money. . . . Oh, pardon

me for bothering you. What exquisite weather it is today. And how that black dress becomes you. (*Bows extravagantly.*)

POPOVA. Silly and bad-mannered.

SMIRNOV (*mimicking her*). Silly and bad-mannered! I don't know how to behave in the company of a lady! Madam, I've seen more women in my time than you have sparrows. I've fought three duels over them, jilted twelve of them and been jilted by nine. Yes, my dear lady. Time was when I used to prance round them like a fool, idolise them, pamper them, flatter them, bow and scrape to them. I suffered, sighed, melted, simmered, boiled. I loved passionately, wildly, in all manner of ways, damn it! I chattered away like a magpie about female emancipation and wasted half my fortune on the objects of my affection. But now, not for all the world! You won't fool me now. I have had enough! Passionate dark eyes, ruby lips, dimpled cheeks, moonlight, soft whispers, gentle sighs—I wouldn't give you tuppence for the whole lot, Madam. Present company excepted, of course, but all women, young or old alike, are affected, spiteful, vain, petty, heartless, infuriatingly illogical, gossip-mongers and born liars. And as for this (*tapping his forehead*)—excuse my being so frank—any sparrow is a genius compared with a philosopher in petticoats. The sight of one of these poetic beings—a demi-goddess, muslin-clad and ethereal—sends you into a thousand raptures, yet gaze into her soul and what do you find—a regular hyena. (*Grabs hold of the back of the chair which splits and breaks.*) But the most exasperating thing is that for some reason this hyena imagines that loving is its special talent, privilege and monopoly! Damn it all, you can hang me upside down on that nail over there if a woman is capable of feeling the slightest affection for anything but a lapdog. All she does when she's in love is snivel and complain! While the man suffers and sacrifices, her love consists of rustling her skirts and trying to twist him round her little finger. You have the misfortune of being a woman, so you must know all about the female character from your own. Tell me quite honestly: have you ever met a woman who was sincere, faithful and constant? You haven't. Only old or ugly

ones are faithful and constant. You're more likely to find a cat with horns than a constant woman!

POPOVA. Begging your pardon, but exactly who then, in your opinion, is faithful and constant in love? The man?

SMIRNOV. Yes, the man.

POPOVA. The man! (*Laughs bitterly.*) The man is faithful and constant in love! Well, that *is* news! (*Heatedly.*) What right have you to say that? Men are faithful and constant! Since we're about it, I would like you to know that of all the men I have ever known my late husband was the best. I loved him dearly, with all my soul, as only a young, intelligent woman can love. I gave him my youth, my happiness, my life and my fortune. He was my be all and end all. I worshipped him like an idol and . . . and . . . then what? This best of all men deceived me at the drop of a hat in the most shameless way. After his death I found a whole drawer full of love letters in his desk, and when he was alive—I shudder to think of it—he used to leave me all alone for weeks on end, flirt with other women and deceive me before my very eyes. He frittered away my money and mocked my feelings. Yet in spite of all this I loved him and remained true to him. What is more, I am still faithful and constant to him even though he is dead. I have buried myself forever within these four walls and shall never discard this mourning to my dying day. . . .

SMIRNOV (*laughing scornfully*). Mourning! What do you take me for? As if I didn't know why you are wearing that black hooded cloak and have buried yourself within these four walls! It's all so mysterious, so poetic. Some young army officer or idiot of a poet will drive past the house, look up at the window and think: "Ah, there lives the mysterious Tamara who has buried herself within those four walls for love of her dead husband." We know all those little tricks.

POPOVA (*flaring up*). How dare you say such things to me!

SMIRNOV. You've buried yourself alive but you didn't forget to powder your nose.

POPOVA. How dare you talk to me like that!

SMIRNOV. Don't shout please. I'm not your bailiff.

And kindly allow me to speak plainly. I'm not a woman and I'm used to speaking my mind! Kindly don't shout.

POPOVA. You're the one who's shouting, not me. Kindly leave me alone!

SMIRNOV. Pay me the money and I'll go.

POPOVA. I won't pay you.

SMIRNOV. Oh yes, you will.

POPOVA. Just to spite you, I won't give you a farthing! Go away and leave me alone.

SMIRNOV. I haven't the pleasure of being either your husband or your fiancée, so please don't make a scene. (*Sits down.*) I don't like it.

POPOVA (*fuming with rage*). You dare to sit down?

SMIRNOV. Yes.

POPOVA. Kindly leave immediately.

SMIRNOV. Kindly give me my money. . . . (*Aside.*) Oh, what a rage I'm in!

POPOVA. I do not propose to talk to impudent rascals! Kindly get out! (*Pause.*) So you're not going?

SMIRNOV. No.

POPOVA. Not going?

SMIRNOV. No!

POPOVA. Very well then. (*Rings.*)

## IX

### The others and Luka

POPOVA. See this gentleman out, Luka.

LUKA. Please leave when you're told to, sir. It's not right. . . .

SMIRNOV (*leaping up*). Shut up! Who do you think you're talking to? I'll make mincemeat out of you!

LUKA (*clutching his chest*). Oh, my godfathers! (*Collapses into an armchair.*) I've come over all funny. Can't get my breath.

POPOVA. Where's Dasha? (*Shouts.*) Dasha! Marfa! Dasha! (*Rings.*)

LUKA. They're all out berry-picking. Ooh. I'm ill! Water!

POPOVA. Will you please get out of here!

SMIRNOV. Will you please be a little more polite.

POPOVA (*clenching her fists and stamping.*) You lout! You great bear! You bully! You monster!

SMIRNOV. What's that? What did you say?

POPOVA. I said you were a bear, a monster!

SMIRNOV (*advancing towards her.*) And what gives you the right to insult me, pray?

POPOVA. What if I am insulting you? Do you think I'm afraid of you?

SMIRNOV. And do you think you have the right to insult someone and get away with it just because you belong to the fair sex? Eh? I challenge you to a duel!

LUKA. Oh, my godfathers! Water!

SMIRNOV. Pistols!

POPOVA. And do you think I'm afraid of you just because you have big fists and bellow like an ox? You bully!

SMIRNOV. A duel! I won't be insulted by anyone, even if it is a member of the weaker sex.

POPOVA (*trying to shout him down.*) You great bear! Bear! Bear!

SMIRNOV. It's high time we got rid of the idea that only men have to answer for their insults. Equal rights means equal rights, damn it! I challenge you!

POPOVA. So you want a duel, do you? Delighted to oblige.

SMIRNOV. This very minute.

POPOVA. This very minute it shall be. My husband had some pistols. I'll go and fetch them. (*Hurries out, then returns.*) How I shall enjoy sending a bullet into that thick skull of yours! Damn you! (*Exit.*)

SMIRNOV. I'll shoot her like a sitting duck. I'm no young lad, no sentimental pup! The weaker sex doesn't exist as far as I'm concerned.

LUKA. Dear, kind sir! (*Getting down on his knees.*) Take pity on an old man, I beseech you. Go away from here. You've frightened me to death, and now you're going to have a duel.

SMIRNOV (*ignoring him*). A duel. There's equal rights for you, there's emancipation for you. Both sexes quite



equal. I'll shoot her as a matter of principle. But what a woman! (*Mimics her.*) "Damn you . . . I'll send a bullet into that thick skull of yours." What a woman! Her face flushed, her eyes sparkled and she accepted the challenge! I've never seen another like her in all my life. . . .

LUKA. Go away, kind sir. And I'll pray for you for the rest of my days.

SMIRNOV. There's a woman for you! I should say so! A real woman! No moping and moaning—all fire, gun-powder and sparks. It seems a pity to knock her off.

LUKA(*weeping*). Dear, kind sir . . . please go away.

SMIRNOV. I like her. I really do. In spite of the dimples. Wouldn't even mind forgetting about the debt. And my bad temper's gone. A marvellous woman!

## X

### The others and Mrs Popova

POPOVA(*enters with pistols*). Here are the pistols. Before we start perhaps you would oblige by showing me how to use them. I've never held a pistol in my life. . . .

LUKA. Merciful Heavens. I'll go and fetch the gardener and the coachman. What's brought this disaster upon us? (*Exit.*)

SMIRNOV (*inspecting the pistols*). Well, there are several types of pistols, you see. There's the Mortimer, that's a special duelling pistol with capsules. These pistols of yours are Smith Wessons, triple action with ejector and central fire. Lovely things. Worth at least ninety roubles the pair. You hold it like this. . . . (*Aside.*) What eyes! What eyes! She's enough to set a man on fire.

POPOVA. Like this?

SMIRNOV. That's right. Then you cock the hammer . . . and take aim like this. Head back a little. Stretch out your arm as far as you can . . . that's it. Then you press this with your finger—and that's all there is to it. The main thing is not to get flustered and not to hurry when you're taking aim. Try to keep your hand from shaking.

POPOVA. I see. . . . It's not very convenient shooting indoors. Let's go into the garden.

SMIRNOV. Very well. But I warn you that I shall fire into the air.

POPOVA. That's the last straw! Why?

SMIRNOV. Because . . . because. . . . That's my business.

POPOVA. Lost your nerve, have you? Eh? Ha, ha! No, sir. Don't start making excuses. Kindly follow me! I shan't rest until I've made a hole in your forehead . . . that forehead there, the one I hate so much! So you've lost your nerve, have you?

SMIRNOV. Yes.

POPOVA. You're lying. Why don't you want to duel?

SMIRNOV. Because . . . because . . . I find you too attractive.

POPOVA (*laughing angrily*). He finds me too attractive! He has the presumption to say he finds me attractive. (*Points to the door.*) Good day, sir.

SMIRNOV (*puts down the revolver in silence, picks up his cap and goes to the door; he stops and they look at each other for about thirty seconds without speaking; then he walks up to Popova hesitantly and says*). Listen . . . Are you still angry? I'm in a devilish rage, too, but you see . . . how can I put it? The fact is, you see, strictly speaking this sort of business. . . . (*Shouts.*) Can I help it if I find you attractive? (*Grabs the back of a chair which splits and breaks.*) Damned fragile furniture you've got here! I find you attractive! Do you understand? I . . . I'm almost in love with you!

POPOVA. Keep away from me. I hate you!

SMIRNOV. By Jove, what a woman! I've never seen another like her in all my life! I'm finished! Done for! Caught like a mouse in a trap!

POPOVA. Keep your distance, or I'll shoot.

SMIRNOV. Shoot then! You can't imagine what joy it would be to die under the gaze of those wonderful eyes, to die from a revolver held in that tiny velvet hand. I've taken leave of my senses. You must decide now, for if I leave this house we shall never meet again! Make your decision. I come from a good family, I'm an honest man,

I have an income of ten thousand a year, I can hit a coin in the air. I've got some splendid horses. Will you be my wife?

POPOVA (*angrily brandishes her revolver*). A duel! I challenge you!

SMIRNOV. I've gone mad! I don't understand anything! (*Shouts.*) Hey, there! Bring some water!

POPOVA (*shouts*). I challenge you!

SMIRNOV. I've gone mad. I'm head over heels in love like a young stripling, like a fool! (*Seizes her hand and she squeals with pain.*) I love you! (*Gets down on his knees.*) I love you as I've never loved before. I've jilted twelve women and nine have jilted me, but I never loved any of them like I love you. I've gone all sugary and syrupy and soft . . . I'm on my bended knees like a fool, proposing like a fool. What a shocking disgrace! Haven't been in love for five years. Promised I wouldn't. And now I've gone and put my neck in the noose! I offer you my hand. Yes or no? You don't have to, if you don't want to. (*Gets up and walks quickly to the door.*)

POPOVA. Stop. . . .

SMIRNOV (*stops*). Well. . . .

POPOVA. Nothing . . . you can go. . . . But, stop. . . . No, you can go! I hate you! Or do I? Don't go! Ah, if only you knew how angry I am! (*Throws the revolver on to the table.*) This wretched thing has made my fingers go numb. (*Tears her kerchief with rage.*) What are you standing there for? Get out!

SMIRNOV. Adieu.

POPOVA. Yes, yes, get out! (*Shouts.*) Where are you going? Stop! Oh well, go! Ah, how angry I am! Keep your distance! Keep your distance!

SMIRNOV (*goes up to her*). How furious I am with myself! I've fallen in love like a schoolboy. Gone down on my bended knees. It's enough to give you goosepimples. (*Roughly.*) I love you! Of all the stupid things to do! Tomorrow I've got to pay the interest, haymaking has started, and now there's you. . . . (*Puts his arms round her waist.*) I'll never forgive myself.

POPOVA. Keep your distance! Take your hands off me! I . . . hate you! I ch-challenge you! (*A long kiss.*)

## XI

The same, Luka with an axe, the gardener with a pitchfork and  
some workmen with poles

LUKA (*seeing the kissing couple*). My godfathers!  
(*Pause.*)

POPOVA (*with downcast eyes*). Luka, tell them not to  
give Toby any oats today.

*Curtain*

# THE ANNIVERSARY

*A one-act farce*

## CHARACTERS

ANDREI SHIPUCHIN, Chairman of the Board of the N... Mutual Credit Society, not too old, wears a monocle

TATIANA, his wife, aged 25

KIRIN, the bank's elderly bookkeeper

Mrs MERCHUTKINA, an elderly woman in an old-fashioned coat

SHAREHOLDERS

BANK EMPLOYEES

The action takes place in the N... Mutual Credit Bank

The office of the Chairman of the Board. A door left leads into the bank's general office. Two writing desks. The interior is designed to give an impression of tasteful luxury: velvet-upholstered furniture, flowers, statues, carpets and a telephone. Midday.

Kirin alone and wearing felt boots

KIRIN (*shouts through the door*). Send someone to the chemist's for ten kopecks worth of valerian drops, and bring some fresh water to the Chairman's office! How many more times do I have to tell you! (*Walks to the desk.*) I'm worn out! I've been working for four days now without a wink of sleep, here in the daytime and at home all night. (*Coughs.*) And to make matters worse I'm feverish all over. Shivering, high temperature, bad cough, weak at the knees and exclamation marks before the eyes! (*Sits down.*) That wretched Chairman of ours is going to present a report at the general meeting today. "Our bank, its present and future." Doesn't half fancy himself! (*Writes.*) One ... one ... six... nought ... seven. That makes six ... nought ... one ... six.... He's out to pull the wool over everyone's eyes, so I have to sit here and slave away for him. He's written a lot of airy-fairy nonsense, damn and blast him, so I have to sit up day and night doing the figures. (*Clicks away on his abacus.*) The devil take him! (*Writes.*) One ... three ... seven ... two ... one

... nought. He's promised to reward me for my pains. If all goes well today and he manages to fool them, he's going to give me a gold watch and a bonus of three hundred roubles. We'll see. (*Writes.*) But if all my work is in vain, don't you come complaining to me, my fine friend. I've got quite a temper, I have. Can't answer for my actions when I'm roused. . . .

Noise and applause off-stage. Shipuchin's voice is heard saying: "Thank you! Thank you! I am deeply touched!" Enter Shipuchin. He is wearing a frock-coat and white tie and carrying an album which has just been presented to him.

SHIPUCHIN (*standing in the doorway and addressing his remarks into the general office*). My dear colleagues, I shall cherish your gift until my dying hour as a memento of the happiest days in my life! Yes, indeed, gentlemen! Thank you once again! (*Blows them a kiss and goes up to Kirin.*) My dear friend, my most esteemed friend!

All the time he is on stage clerks keep coming in with papers for him to sign

KIRIN (*getting up.*) Allow me to congratulate you on the fifteenth anniversary of the bank, sir, and to express the hope that. . . .

SHIPUCHIN (*vigorously shaking his hand*). Thank you, my dear friend, thank you! And allow me on this auspicious occasion, our anniversary, to embrace you! (*They embrace.*) I am very happy, very happy indeed. Thank you for your unstinting service, for everything. Thank you, my friend. If I have done anything of value while I have had the honour of being Chairman of this bank, then it is first and foremost thanks to my dear colleagues. (*Sighs.*) Yes, old man, fifteen years! Fifteen years—as sure as my name's Shipuchin! (*Eagerly.*) And how about my report? Is it nearly finished?

KIRIN. Yes, sir. Only five pages to go.

SHIPUCHIN. Excellent. That means it will be ready by three?

KIRIN. Yes, so long as no one disturbs me. I've just got to put the finishing touches.

SHIPUCHIN. That's splendid, absolutely splendid—as sure as my name's Shipuchin. The general meeting is at

four. Be a good fellow and give me the first half now, so that I can study it properly. Come on. (*Takes the report.*) I am placing great hopes on this report. It is my *profession de foi*, or should I say my firework display. My firework display—as sure as my name's Shipuchin. (*Sits down and begins to read the report to himself.*) How devilish tired I am! Had an attack of gout last night, spent the whole morning rushing about getting things done, and now there's all this excitement, applause, and flurry ... I'm so tired!

KIRIN (*writing*). Carry two ... nought ... nought ... three ... nine ... two ... nought .... These figures make everything look green. Take away three ... one ... six ... four ... one ... five .... (*Clicks on his abacus.*)

SHIPUCHIN. There is another unpleasant matter. Your wife came to see me this morning and complained about you again. Said you'd been chasing her and your sister-in-law yesterday evening with a bread knife. What sort of behaviour is that, Kirin? It really won't do!

KIRIN (*sternly*). May I take the liberty of making a request, sir, since it is our anniversary. Would you kindly not interfere with my family life, if only out of respect for my hard work.

SHIPUCHIN (*sighs*). You're impossible, Kirin. You're a fine, upright person, yet you behave towards women as if you were Jack the Ripper. Really. I can't understand why you hate them so much.

KIRIN. And I can't understand why you love them so much. (*Pause.*)

SHIPUCHIN. The employees have just presented me with an album and I understand that the shareholders want to give me an address and a silver decanter. (*Plays with his monocle.*) That's fine—as sure as my name's Shipuchin. It certainly won't come amiss. A little pomp is necessary if the bank is to have a good reputation, damn it. You're a fellow who can be trusted and you know all about it, of course. I wrote the address myself and bought the silver decanter. And a leather cover for the address. That set me back forty-five roubles, but it had to be done. They'd never have thought of it themselves. (*Looks round.*) What a fine place we've got here. Eh? They say I pay

too much attention to trifles, that I only care about having polished doorknobs, clerks wearing smart ties, and a uniformed attendant at the entrance. But no, gentlemen. Doorknobs and uniformed attendants are not trifles. I can be as common as I like at home, sleep and eat like a pig, drink myself silly. . . .

KIRIN. No insinuations, if you please.

SHIPUCHIN. No one's making any insinuations. How impossible you are! Well, as I was saying, at home I can be a vulgar upstart and indulge my crude tastes, but here everything must be done in style. This is a bank! Every detail here must impress, must possess an air of dignity, so to say. (*Picks up a piece of paper and throws it into the fireplace.*) My great service is that I have raised the bank's reputation! It's the tone that matters! Tone—as sure as my name's Shipuchin. (*Looks Kirin up and down.*) I say, old man, the deputation of shareholders might appear any moment now, and you're wearing felt boots and that old scarf—and your jacket's such an awful colour. You might have put on a frock coat, or at least a black suit.

KIRIN. My health is more precious to me than all your shareholders. I'm feverish all over. . . .

SHIPUCHIN. But you do look a mess, you must agree. You're spoiling the whole effect.

KIRIN. I can hide when the deputation comes. That's no trouble. . . . Carry seven . . . one . . . seven . . . two . . . one . . . five . . . nought. I don't like messes either. Seven . . . two . . . nine. (*Clicks on his abacus.*) I can't stand messes. It would have been better if you hadn't invited any ladies to the anniversary dinner this evening.

SHIPUCHIN. Nonsense.

KIRIN. I know you're going to fill the hall with them today just for appearance's sake. But you'd better look out. They'll ruin the whole show. They cause nothing but trouble and mess—women!

SHIPUCHIN. Quite the reverse. Female company is uplifting.

KIRIN. Is it, indeed? Your wife's supposed to be a well-bred woman, but she came out with something last Monday that made my hair stand on end for two whole days. All of a sudden she ups and asks me in front of



other people: "Is it true that my husband has bought the bank a lot of Dongo-Pongo shares that have fallen on the stock exchange? He's so worried." In front of strangers! I can't think why you confide in them. Do you want them to put you in the dock?

SHIPUCHIN. Now then, that's enough. Let's not get too gloomy on our anniversary. Incidentally, you've reminded me. (*Looks at his watch.*) My wife should be arriving soon. Strictly speaking I ought to have met her at the station, the poor thing, but there's so little time and . . . I do feel dreadfully tired. To tell you the truth, I'm not very glad she's coming. Er, that is, I am glad, of course, but it would have been nicer if she'd stayed on for another day or two at her mother's. She'll insist that I spend the whole evening with her, and we'd planned such a nice little expedition after the dinner. . . . (*Shudders.*) It's my nerves. I'm beginning to get the shakes. I'm so on edge that I could burst into tears at the merest trifle! No, I must be strong—as sure as my name's Shipuchin!

Enter Tatiana in a mackintosh with a travelling bag over her shoulder

SHIPUCHIN. Ha! Talk of the devil!

TATIANA. Darling! (*Rushes up to her husband. A prolonged kiss.*)

SHIPUCHIN. We were just talking about you. A minute ago! (*Looks at his watch.*)

TATIANA (*breathlessly*). Did you miss me? Are you well? I came here straight from the station. Haven't even been home yet. I've got so much to tell you, so much, I can hardly wait. I won't take my coat off. I've only dropped in for a minute. (*To Kirin.*) Good afternoon, Mr Kirin! (*To her husband.*) Is everything all right at home?

SHIPUCHIN. Yes, dear. You've got plumper and prettier in the last week. . . . Did you enjoy your visit?

TATIANA. It was marvellous! Mother and Katya send their love. Vassily told me to give you a big hug. (*Hugs him.*) Auntie sent you a pot of jam and everyone's upset because you haven't written. Zina told me to give you a big kiss. (*Kisses him.*) If you only knew what's been going on there! The things that have been happening! It's ter-

rible to even talk about them! Such goings-on! But I can tell from your eyes that you're not pleased to see me.

SHIPUCHIN. Of course I am. Dearest heart! (*Kisses her.*)

Kirin coughs angrily

TATIANA (*sighs deeply*). Poor Katya! Poor, dear Katya! I'm so sorry for her, so dreadfully sorry!

SHIPUCHIN. It's the bank's anniversary today, dearest. A deputation from the shareholders might appear at any minute, and you're not exactly dressed for the occasion.

TATIANA. The bank's anniversary! Oh, congratulations, everybody! Here's wishing you. . . . So there'll be a meeting and a dinner today. Oh, I do enjoy all that. Do you remember the beautiful speech that you spent so long writing for the shareholders? Is that the one they are going to make to you today?

Kirin coughs angrily

SHIPUCHIN (*embarrassed*). We really shouldn't talk about that, dearest. Why don't you get along home?

TATIANA. Yes, in a minute. I'll just tell you what's been happening, then I'll be off. I'll begin right at the beginning. Well, then. When you saw me off, remember, I got a seat next to that stout woman and began to read. I don't like talking in railway carriages. Well, I read for three whole stations and didn't say a word to anybody. Then it got dark and I began to think all sorts of gloomy things. A young man was sitting opposite me, not bad-looking, with brown hair. . . . Well, we got talking. Then a naval officer came up, and a student. (*Giggles.*) I told them I wasn't married. What a fuss they made of me! We talked right up to midnight. The brown-haired young man kept telling terribly funny stories and the officer sang all the time. I laughed so much I nearly split my sides. And when the officer—oh, those naval men—when the officer found out that my name was Tatiana, do you know what he sang? (*Sings in a bass voice.*) "One-gin, I cannot deny, I'll love Tatiana till I die." (*Giggles.*)

Kirin coughs angrily

SHIPUCHIN. We're disturbing Mr Kirin, Tanya. Go home, my sweetheart. Later. . . .

TATIANA. Never mind. Let him listen as well. It's terribly interesting and it won't take a minute. Seryozha met me at the station. Another young man was with him, a tax inspector, I believe . . . not bad-looking, quite handsome, in fact, especially his eyes. . . . Seryozha introduced us and we drove off together. The weather was heavenly. . . .

Voices off-stage: "You can't go in there! Keep out! What do you want?"

Enter Mrs Merchutkina

MERCHUTKINA (*in the doorway, shaking herself free from someone*). Keep your hands off me! Well, I never! I've come to see the boss. (*Enters. To Shipuchin.*) Begging your pardon, your Excellency. I'm Merchutkina. My husband's a clerk at the Council.

SHIPUCHIN. What do you want?

MERCHUTKINA. Well, it's like this, you see, your Excellency. My husband was ill for five months, and while he was in bed having treatment they went and gave him the sack without any reason, your Excellency, and when I came to collect his pay, they'd deducted 24 roubles 36 kopecks from it. "What was that for?" I asks. "He borrowed from the Mutual Aid Fund and some people vouched for him," they told me. But that's rubbish. How could he have borrowed without asking my permission? They shouldn't have done it, your Excellency! I'm a poor woman. The only way I can make ends meet is by taking in lodgers. I'm weak, defenceless. I get pushed around all the time, never hear a kind word from anyone.

SHIPUCHIN. Allow me. (*Takes her application and reads it standing up.*)

TATIANA (*to Kirin*). I ought to begin at the beginning. Last week I suddenly had a letter from Mother. She said that someone called Grendilevsky had proposed to my sister Katya. A fine, upright young man, but quite without any means or any definite status. And just imagine, as luck would have it, Katya fell in love with him.

What were we to do? Mother told me to come immediately, and use my influence with Katya. . . .

KIRIN (*severely*). Excuse me, but you've made me lose count. What with you and Mother and Katya, I've lost count and I don't know where I am.

TATIANA. What does that matter? You should listen when a lady is talking to you. Why are you so bad-tempered today? Perhaps you're in love? (*Giggles*).

SHIPUCHIN (*to Merchutkina*). What's all this about? I don't understand.

TATIANA. You are in love? Ha. You're blushing!

SHIPUCHIN (*to his wife*). Tanya, dear, do go into the office for a minute. I won't be long.

TATIANA. Very well. (*Exit.*)

SHIPUCHIN. I don't know what you're talking about. You've obviously come to the wrong place, Madam. In fact your request has nothing to do with us whatsoever. You should apply to the department where your husband worked.

MERCHUTKINA. I've been to five offices already, sir, and none of them would even look at my petition. I was at my wits' end, then my son-in-law Boris told me to come and see you. "You go and see Mr Shipuchin, Mother," he said. "He's an influential gent. He can get anything done." Please help me, your Excellency.

SHIPUCHIN. I'm afraid we can't do anything for you, Mrs Merchutkina. You must try and understand. As far as I can see your husband worked in the medical department at the Council. But this is a bank, a private, commercial concern. Don't you understand?

MERCHUTKINA. I've got the doctor's certificate to prove that my husband was ill, your Excellency. Here it is. If you'd be so kind as to take a look.

SHIPUCHIN (*irritatedly*). That's very good. I believe you. But I repeat that this has nothing to do with us.

Tatiana's giggling is heard off-stage, followed by a man's laugh

SHIPUCHIN (*glancing at the door*). She's disturbing the clerks out there. (*To Merchutkina.*) It's strange, even

ridiculous. Surely your husband knows where you should take the petition?

MERCHUTKINA. He doesn't know anything, your Excellency. All he can say is "Mind your own business and leave me alone!"

SHIPUCHIN. I repeat, Madam. Your husband worked in the medical department at the local Council. But this is a bank, a private, commercial. . . .

MERCHUTKINA. Yes, yes. I see, sir. In that case, would you just tell them to pay me fifteen roubles. It doesn't matter if I don't get it all at once.

SHIPUCHIN (*sighs*). Heaven help me!

KIRIN. I shall never finish the report at this rate, sir.

SHIPUCHIN. Just a moment. (*To Merchutkina.*) Get it into your thick head! Coming to us with a request like that is as ridiculous as going to the chemist's or the weights and measures office for a divorce.

A knock at the door. Tatiana's voice is heard saying: "May I come in, dear?"

SHIPUCHIN (*shouting*). Just a moment, darling! (*To Mrs Merchutkina.*) So you weren't paid enough, but what has that to do with us? It's our anniversary today, Madam, and we're very busy. People might come in at any minute. Excuse me.

MERCHUTKINA. Take pity on me, your Excellency. I'm just a weak, defenceless woman. . . . All alone in the world. . . . At my wits' end. . . . What with taking the lodgers to court and looking after my old man's affairs and doing the housework, and my son-in-law out of work.

SHIPUCHIN. Mrs Merchutkina, I. . . . No, excuse me, I simply can't talk to you anymore. My head's going round. You're wasting our time and your own. (*Sighs, aside.*) Here's a thick-head as sure as my name's Shipuchin. (*To Kirin.*) Mr Kirin, would you be kind enough to explain to Mrs Merchutkina.

Waves his hand in despair and goes into the other office

KIRIN (*goes up to Merchutkina. Threateningly*). What do you want?

MERCHUTKINA. I'm a weak, defenceless woman. . . .

Maybe I look strong, but if you took me to pieces you'd see I haven't got a healthy vein in my body. I can hardly keep on my feet and I've lost my appetite. Even the coffee this morning tasted funny.

KIRIN. I said, what do you want?

MERCHUTKINA. Tell them to give me fifteen roubles now, sir, and the rest in a month's time.

KIRIN. But you've already been told in words of one syllable—this is a bank.

MERCHUTKINA. Yes, yes, I know. I can show you the medical certificate.

KIRIN. Is that a head on your shoulders, or what?

MERCHUTKINA. I only want what's mine by rights. I don't want anyone else's money.

KIRIN. I ask you, Madam, is that a head on your shoulders, or what? I can't waste time talking to you, damn it! I'm very busy. (*Shows her the door.*) Good day to you.

MERCHUTKINA (*in amazement*). But what about the money?

KIRIN. So it's not a head on your shoulders, it's a bit of this.

Taps the wooden table and then his forehead

MERCHUTKINA (*taking offence*). Dunderhead yourself! You just mind your step with me. My husband's a clerk at the Council.

KIRIN (*losing his temper and hissing*). Get out!

MERCHUTKINA. Now then! Don't you shout at me!

KIRIN (*hissing*). If you don't get out this very minute I'll send for the hall-porter! Out! (*Stamps his foot.*)

MERCHUTKINA. Don't stamp your foot at me. I'm not afraid of the likes of you. You old scallywag!

KIRIN. I've never seen anything so repulsive in all my life. Ugh! It fair turns you up. (*Breathing heavily.*) I'll tell you once more. Listen! If you don't get out this minute, you old bag, I'll make mincemeat of you. With a temper like mine, I could cripple you for life. I can't answer for my actions.

MERCHUTKINA. Shut up, you old blunderbuss. You can't frighten me. I've tackled worse than you.

KIRIN (*in despair*). I can't bear the sight of her. I feel

ill! I can't stand it! (*Goes to his desk and sits down.*) The bank is infested with women and I can't write my report! I just can't stand it!

MERCHUTKINA. I'm not after anyone else's money, just what's mine by rights. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, wearing felt boots in a place like this. Ignorant lout.

Enter Shipuchin and Tatiana

TATIANA (*following her husband*). In the evening we went to the Berezhnitskys. Katya was wearing her pale blue taffeta, the one with lace trimming and a plunging neck-line. She looks lovely with her hair up, so I did it for her. She looked like a dream.

SHIPUCHIN (*who now has a splitting headache*). Yes, yes, like a dream. They might arrive at any minute now.

MERCHUTKINA. Your Excellency!

SHIPUCHIN (*miserably*). What is it now? What do you want now?

MERCHUTKINA. Your Excellency! (*Points at Kirin.*) That there . . . that nasty piece of work over there tapped his forehead and then tapped the table. You told him to look into my case and all he does is make fun of me and say all sorts of rude things. I'm just a weak, defenceless woman. . . .

SHIPUCHIN. All right, Madam, I'll look into it and see that something is done. Later on. Now go away. (*Aside.*) My gout's coming on.

KIRIN (*goes up to Shipuchin, in a low voice*). Let me call the hall-porter, sir, and have her thrown out on her backside. This is impossible!

SHIPUCHIN (*alarmed*). No, no! She'll scream the place down. There are lots of private apartments in this building.

MERCHUTKINA. Your Excellency!

KIRIN (*on the verge of tears*). But I've got to get on with the report! I won't finish it in time! (*Goes back to his desk.*) I can't stand it!

MERCHUTKINA. When can I have the money, your Excellency? I need it right away.

SHIPUCHIN (*angrily, aside*). What a dreadful old

bag! (*To her, gently.*) I've already told you, Madam. This is a bank, a private, commercial concern. . . .

MERCHUTKINA. Do me a kindness, your Excellency, befriend a poor woman who's all alone in the world. If a medical certificate's not enough, I can get a chitty from the police station as well. Tell them to pay me the money.

Shipuchin gives a loud groan

TATIANA (*to Merchutkina*). They've told you, old woman. You're being a nuisance. What a funny old thing you are.

MERCHUTKINA. Oh, Missus, you beautiful lady, I've got no one to help me. I get no pleasure from eating or drinking any more. Even the coffee this morning tasted funny.

SHIPUCHIN (*at the end of his tether, to Merchutkina*). How much do you want?

MERCHUTKINA. Twenty-four roubles, thirty-six kopecks.

SHIPUCHIN. Very well! (*Takes a twenty-five rouble note out of his wallet and gives it to her.*) Here's twenty-five roubles. Take it and go away.

Kirin coughs angrily

MERCHUTKINA. Oh, thanking you kindly, your Excellency! (*Puts the money away.*)

TATIANA (*sits down next to her husband*). It's time I was going home. (*Looks at her watch.*) But I haven't finished yet. It won't take a minute, then I'll be off. Such goings-on there were! So we went to a party at the Berezhnitskys that evening. It wasn't bad, quite fun, but nothing special. Katya's young man, Grendilevsky, was there too, of course. Well, I'd already had a talk with Katya. I'd cried a bit and used my influence with her, so she had it out with Grendilevsky at the party and refused him. I thought everything had turned out beautifully: I had set Mother's mind at rest, and rescued Katya, so now I could relax and enjoy myself. Then what do you think! Just before dinner Katya and I were walking in the garden,



when suddenly. . . . (*Agitatedly.*) Suddenly we heard a shot. I can't talk about it calmly! (*Fans herself with her kerchief.*) Oh, dear!

Shipuchin sighs

TATIANA (*weeping*). We ran into the summer-house and there . . . on the floor . . . lay poor Grendilevsky . . . with a pistol in his hand.

SHIPUCHIN. I can't stand this any longer! I can't stand it! (*To Merchutkina.*) What else do you want?

MERCHUTKINA. Could my husband have his job back, your Excellency?

TATIANA (*weeping*). He'd shot himself right in the heart. Right here. Katya fainted, the poor thing. And he was awfully frightened too, just lay and . . . and asked us to fetch the doctor. The doctor came quickly and . . . and saved the unfortunate young man. . . .

MERCHUTKINA. Could my husband have his job back, your Excellency?

SHIPUCHIN. I can't stand it! (*With tears in his eyes.*) I can't stand any more of it! (*Stretches out his hands in despair to Kirin.*) Make her go away! I beg you. Get her out of here!

KIRIN (*going up to Tatiana*). Out you go!

SHIPUCHIN. Not her! The other one. . . . That awful old bag. . . . (*Pointing to Merchutkina*). That one!

KIRIN (*not understanding him, to Tatiana*). Out you go! (*Stamping his foot.*) Get out!

TATIANA. What? How dare you! Have you gone mad?

SHIPUCHIN. This is terrible. What an unhappy man I am! Get rid of her! Make her go away!

KIRIN (*to Tatiana*). Out! Or I'll cripple you for life! Mash you into little pieces! I can't answer for my actions!

TATIANA (*runs away, with him chasing after her*). How dare you! You scoundrel. (*Shouts.*) Andrei! Help! Andrei! (*Screeches.*)

SHIPUCHIN (*running after them*). Stop it! I beg you! Be quiet! Think of my reputation!

KIRIN (*chasing after Merchutkina*). Get out of here! Catch her! Give her what-for! Make mincemeat of her!

SHIPUCHIN (*shouting*). Stop it! I beg you! I beseech you!

MERCHUTKINA. Heavens above ... Mercy be ... (*Screeches.*) Oh, my godfathers!

TATIANA (*shouting*). Help! Help! Oh, I feel ill! (*Jumps onto a chair, then collapses on the sofa, moaning as if she were fainting.*)

KIRIN (*chasing after Merchutkina*). Beat her! Bash her! Conk her!

MERCHUTKINA. Oh, my godfathers! Everything's going black! Oh! (*Faints into Shipuchin's arms.*)

A knock at the door and a voice off-stage saying "The deputation"

SHIPUCHIN. Deputation ... reputation ... occupation. ...

KIRIN (*stamping his foot*). Get out, blast you! (*Rolls up his sleeves.*) Let me get hold of her! I can't answer for my actions!

Enter a deputation of five men, all in dress-coats. One is holding the address in a velvet cover, another the silver decanter. The bank clerks are looking through the door. Tatiana is lying on the sofa and Mrs Merchutkina is in Shipuchin's arms, both women moaning quietly

SHAREHOLDER (*reads out loudly*). Dear and deeply respected Mr Shipuchin. Casting a retrospective glance at the past of our financial establishment and following in our mind's eye the history of its gradual development, we are gratified in the extreme. True, in the early days of its existence the limited scope of the basic capital, the absence of any serious financial operations, and also the indefinite nature of its aims brought Hamlet's question very much to the fore: "To be or not to be?" At one time there were even suggestions that the bank should be closed. But then you came to take charge of our establishment. Your knowledge, energy and innate tact are responsible for the extraordinary success and remarkable prosperity. The bank's reputation ... (*coughs*) ... the bank's reputation. ...

Mrs Merchutkina groans

TATIANA (*groans*). Water! Water!

SHAREHOLDER (*continues*). The bank's reputation (*coughs*) has been raised so high by you that our establishment can today compete with the best rival concerns abroad....

SHIPUCHIN. Deputation ... reputation ... occupation....

Two friends one evening did walk,  
And they did have an earnest talk....  
Oh, do not say your youth is lost,  
Tormented by my jealousy.

SHAREHOLDER (*continues, embarrassedly*). And then, as we cast an objective glance at the present, dear and deeply respected Mr Shipuchin ... (*lowers his voice*). Perhaps we had better come back later.... Better come back later....

They go out in confusion

*Curtain*

1891

## AFTERWORD

*An excerpt from "The Profession of the Stage-Director" by G. Tovstonogov*

I had never produced Chekhov, although I had longed to do so ever since I can remember. For me Chekhov is more than a great Russian dramatist and writer, a world literary classic: he is a great explorer, the prophet and Columbus of the twentieth-century theatre. The great Gorky was a pupil of Chekhov's. I am quite convinced that not only the Moscow Art Theatre and the Russian Theatre as a whole owe a great debt to him, but also Hemingway and Saroyan, and the Italian neo-realists. Without Chekhov there could have been no Leonov and Afinogenov, Arbuzov and Volodin, no... One could go on and on. Chekhov erected thousands of invisible memorials to himself in the hearts and minds of at least three generations of writers.

Several times I was intending to do a production of Chekhov. Everything seemed to dispose towards it—good actors, and all the time and facilities I needed. But every time I shrank from it. I felt I could not add anything to what the Art Theatre had already said in *The Three Sisters*. I could not possibly put it any better than Nemirovich-Danchenko, and who needed poor copies of a brilliant production or senseless attempts to alter at all costs a perfect work of art?

But did this mean that the solution the Art Theatre had found to Chekhov's play had deprived the theatre forever of the possibility of producing it differently? Of course not, as is proved best of all by Nemirovich-Danchenko himself, who created a completely new version of *The Three Sisters*. The great friend and interpreter of Chekhov realised that a new time and new audiences required a new approach if the play were to retain its

vitality, and that time reveals a new ring, new ideas in Chekhov.

Chekhov's dream of a bright future seemed vain to his contemporaries, like building castles in the air. Astrov hoped that man would be happy in a thousand years' time. Vershinin insisted that "in another two or three hundred years life on earth would be unimaginably beautiful". This longing for the impossible gave rise to the tendency to regard Chekhov as a pessimist. But for us today, Chekhov is not a prophet of gloom but a herald and champion of a bright future.

Treplev in *The Seagull* says: "We need new forms." But he invented them and was defeated in an argument with Trigorin, a man of letters who wrote well but in the old way.

New ideas and new forms are part of the very fabric of Chekhov's plays. One needs time to discover them. Chekhov was bound to come to us as a young, inspired dreamer, a wise friend and stern judge and teacher, to help the great-grandchildren of Astrov and Vershinin, Uncle Vanya and the three sisters to love life more, to make it more beautiful and to dream more boldly of a "diamond-spangled sky".

I knew all along that I would one day produce Chekhov. It was something I just had to do. I saw it as the most difficult, but at the same time the most satisfying, examination for the right to consider myself a contemporary director. And I consider it no coincidence in my artistic evolution that I came to Chekhov via Dostoyevsky, Gorky, Griboyedov and, even earlier, Ostrovsky, Chernyshevsky and Saltykov-Shchedrin.

Thus we faced a great challenge, the challenge of emulating Nemirovich-Danchenko's great production, representing the highest achievement of the Moscow Art Theatre. But we accepted that challenge. Not because we wanted to try just another production of a classic, but because we felt that Chekhov was necessary, indeed absolutely essential, today. I cannot think of any other playwright who made such a passionate effort to transform the human soul, to bring the finest qualities in people. The poetry of the life Chekhov dreamed of, his civic protest

against the philistinism that stifles this dream, make his plays have an impact on people's lives such as no other dramatist, with the exception of Shakespeare, has achieved.

Why did we choose *The Three Sisters* rather than any other of Chekhov's plays? It seemed to me that in our age of active creative interference in life and nature, the theme of tragic inactivity acquires a special impact and vital relevance. I felt that the more nobility, goodness and kindness the heroes had, the greater the tragic impact of the theme of their spiritual paralysis would be. In presenting today the story of the shattered dreams of Chekhov's heroes, of the collapse of their ideals, I wanted to capture the full tragedy of their plight, for *The Three Sisters* is a profoundly tragic work. The somewhat subdued tone of the play is only a means. The essence of the work is the civic anger of the author and his boundless love for humanity, his tremendous involvement with life.

Take Act Four, for example. It was always been played as a sad, wistful elegy, with a touch of faint, inexplicable regret for something that is passing away. We felt, however, that it could now be done in a different key, and that the shot coupled with the remark "one Baron less" was the main emotional stroke, which quite possibly embodied the meaning of the whole play, Chekhov's reason for writing it. After all, it is not Solyony who kills Tusenbach, but the surrounding indifference, the unbroken silence that reigns. It is not physical death that is so terrible, but the slow moral, spiritual death. Such was the new tragic chord we wished to achieve in the finale.

Today the tragedy of the action ought to be presented in higher relief and sound more terrible than before. We endeavoured to make the combination of the poetry of life and the evil opposing man's dreams as emphatic and acute as possible. This involved reviewing all the expressive means at our disposal. The failure of the Alexandrinsky Theatre production of *The Seagull* was a lesson to us in many respects. Why was it that the professional actors of one of the best Russian theatres had failed, while yesterday's amateurs, practically unknown actors under Stanislavsky, had succeeded?

Chekhov is a strict author, and he always avenges egoism on the part of actors. Stanislavsky, an innovator himself, grasped what was novel in the essence of Chekhov's works. Sixty years have past since then, and we should be that much wiser than Chekhov's contemporaries.

In tackling *The Three Sisters* we had no illusions about the incredible complexity of the task we were undertaking. Apart from having to bear in mind the essential condition of reading a classic from the standpoint of today, we had also to remember that Chekhov was an innovator in drama not only in the sense that he was creating something new for his time, but in his demand that the expressive means employed be new in relation to the time when the play is being produced.

What did I feel to be the essentially new features in dramatic art without which our work on the play would have been in vain?

I was amazed at the vast audiences poetry readings have been drawing these last few years, reading, moreover, as often as not, by unknown poets and reciters, who in themselves could not possibly have acted as a magnet for the public. Why was it that thousands of people snapped up tickets to listen to one man reciting poetry for several hours on end?

It all seemed to contradict the generally accepted opinion of what the public wants, and suggests some new laws of audience response. If we wished to find more effective means of producing an impact on audiences with our art we had to understand these laws.

Shortly before we began work on *The Three Sisters* I saw an unusual production at the Brecht Theatre. It was entitled *Poems and Songs*. On the stage were actors of the Berliner Ensemble and a small band. The only decoration was Picasso's dove on a grey canvas backcloth. The actors read poems and aphorisms by Brecht, and extracts from his diaries, and sang songs to his words. But this was not simply a concert programme consisting of separate numbers. It was an integrated spectacle in which a song passed into poetry, poetry into prose, prose into music and back to a song. It was a peculiarly organised stage

spectacle, moulded and cemented by a single artistic will, and it was a tremendous success with the audience.

I have been told that another production by the same company in which Brecht's statements on the theatre are collected and organised into an integrated whole enjoys even greater success. It is done as follows. The actors are playing the last act of *Hamlet* when suddenly a man made up as Brecht comes onto the stage and says that you cannot act like that today. There follows a rehearsal during which Brecht's directions are followed exactly as they appear in his rehearsal notes, and his statements on the theatre and extracts from his theoretical articles are quoted. These directions have all been carefully chosen so that they are not only embodied in the rehearsal but really strike home.

It might seem that such a spectacle could only be of interest to theatre people, to directors, actors and critics. In fact it was Berlin's biggest box-office success.

To take another example, the best thing I had seen at the Art Theatre during the last decade or so was *Dear Liar*. I began to wonder why it was that a theatre that had based its art on the aesthetics of verisimilitude should have scored such a triumph with a play which in its very essence had nothing at all to do with fidelity to everyday life. Two actors read the letters of Bernard Shaw and Mrs Patrick Campbell, making no attempt whatsoever to create the illusion of life on the stage. This is simply a clash of thoughts and complicated human relationships, so complicated that they embrace the whole world.

Why was it that a production that broke with the theatre's fundamental aesthetic principles which it had always observed brought it the greatest success? Could it be a mere coincidence?

I think not. I am convinced that the contemporary theatre should on no account be interested in making the illusion of real life on the stage the sole aim of art. I for one find myself getting terribly bored when I see the illusion of life on the stage. A man comes on, takes off his hat, advances a few steps and says: "Good morning!" "Life-like" though it is, it is extremely dull to watch if there is nothing else to the man's appearance.



In the days when the aesthetics of verisimilitude was only coming into its own, it produced a powerful impact. I remember several productions at the Art Theatre where a series of extremely life-like situations was quite captivating.

But I am quite sure that today verisimilitude has lost all its power. However well done, a production that is "true-to-life" and nothing more, can have no real impact at all.

Andrei Mikhailovich Lobanov, a remarkable director whose importance in the Soviet theatre is still not fully appreciated to this day, understood this perfectly. Under his management, the Yermolova Theatre was the most up-to-date in Moscow.

Lobanov produced Malyugin's *Old Friends*, which was put on by numerous theatres throughout the country. I have a vivid recollection of one of the central scenes, the conversation between Shura and Volodya about love. Since the scene is one of the culminating points of the play, directors, aware of its importance, have invariably devoted the most scrupulous attention to its *mise-en-scène*. In Lobanov's production, Shura and Volodya simply walked onto the stage, stood facing the audience and hardly made a single movement throughout the dialogue.

I remember being quite amazed, not so much by the unexpectedness of this solution in an essentially naturalistic production as by the fact that I suddenly realised how absolutely justified it was by the logic of the play. The conversation between the two old friends was so exceptionally important that the director felt the need to clear the stage of everything that might distract attention from the ideas being expressed.

It never occurred to anybody else to adopt this approach. Why? Surely other directors had sought to make the scene as expressive as possible. Of course they had. But only Lobanov sensed and grasped the new laws of audience perception that were emerging.

Thus, this process began a long time ago, although directors failed to understand it. We at the Gorky Theatre first sensed it when working on *The Fox and the Grapes*. We began work quite convinced that the audience would

be thoroughly bored by a production in which five people recite monologues for three hours on end with nothing else happening on the stage. We felt then that we were doing this work more for ourselves than for the audience, but as it turned out the production not only drew full houses for several years, but even competed successfully with the cinema and television.

When I took a fresh look at some of our older productions, I realised that where we had paid homage to illustration, to creating the illusion of real life, elementary verisimilitude, we had failed, and that our real triumphs had come when we had managed to avoid this—such productions were still as “alive” as on the first night.

I consider poetic truth to be one of the chief features of the contemporary style at the present stage. The art of external verisimilitude is on the way out, and all its means should be scrapped wholesale. The theatre of a new kind of truth is emerging, poetic truth, which demands that the expressive means be made as precise and concrete as possible. Every action must be charged with meaning and not simply illustrative. In this way every detail on the stage becomes a realistic symbol. This, far from disregarding the basic principles of realism, makes realism poetic and figurative instead of naturalistic, which is what is needed today.

If at one time we got away with a great deal that lacked figurative and poetic quality but was simply true-to-life, and we were perfectly satisfied with such a production, today audiences are less and less prepared to accept such work.

Once Ostrovsky went behind the scenes during a performance at the Maly Theatre and listened to the superb delivery of the actors. Only recently I felt that the theatre had grown up since those days when everything was for the ear and nothing for the eyes, how out-of-date this attitude was. But now I realise that Ostrovsky was perfectly right. The plastic aspect must be present in a production only to the minimum degree necessary to make what is happening understandable. Anything else is superfluous.

Thus I recently found the answer for myself to what

I feel to be the most important and essential thing in the theatre today. I now understand why people flock to Brecht's *Poems and Songs* and why it is practically impossible to get tickets for a poetry evening.

Such art provokes thought and excites the imagination far more than spectacular sets or acting that is ostensibly true-to-life but not dictated by the necessity of the super-objective.

Although this demand is by no means new—Stanislavsky himself insisted that the most important thing on the stage was to recreate "the life of the human spirit"—today it has arisen before us in a new quality, as it were, and we must reinterpret a great deal in our practice if we are to capture the new, present-day nature of this law of art. It was my wish to try and embody that principle as far as possible in *The Three Sisters*.

We made it a strict principle that not a single second of stage time should be wasted on showing a likeness to life, that we must show in domestic situations the intense inner life of the heroes, that there should be no preconceived or premeditated *mise-en-scènes* in our production, which was to be outwardly static despite the vitality of thought. The only way to achieve this was to apply the most stringent self-restraint. We agreed that no one should be allowed to slip into the comfortable, easy groove of the familiar and the achieved.

We should have found it far too easy to achieve our aim if we had been doing Brecht, for example. Chekhov is a playwright from whose works it is quite impossible to exclude period elements altogether. But we had set ourselves the difficult task of following the inner law according to which not a single physical action can be performed on the stage that is simply true-to-life without embodying some other, intrinsic meaning. We had to check and regulate one another, to endeavour to overcome the force of habit, the inertia, the strong attraction for illustrative verisimilitude that abides in every one of us and often makes it extremely difficult to resist backsliding towards the old methods. I was determined to produce a feeling of real palpable life within the framework of the poetic, realistic symbol.

In the course of our work we were constantly striving to achieve a combination of the terrible power of evil, tragedy and radiant faith in man.

Chekhov's play does not involve a struggle between two camps. The struggle is invisible. The chief adversary is not named. Chekhov loved all his characters: what he hated was the absurd, futile existence which engendered in them tragic inactivity, lethargy, listlessness and, in the long run, total apathy. Naturally we had to reach some sort of attitude to Chekhov's heroes, but the struggle is not between them but with the senseless lives they lead. It is significant that Chekhov wrote this play on the eve of the 1905 Revolution, that he was such an ardent opponent of petty actions. Behind this lies his fierce loathing of inactivity as a phenomenon of Russian life, for all his love of people themselves.

We saw the contemporary validity of the play to consist not in showing how Chekhov's heroes foresaw our life, the future. We wished to find the life-asserting principle in the work in a deeper, less obvious sense. As I see it, Chekhov's optimism is expressed in the way he struggles for thought and deeds, for activity, and understands that the way of life he is describing is doomed to obsolescence. This being so, we sought the life-asserting principle in rejection and negation: we wanted the audience to be infected by the same sentiment of passionate protest against the senselessness and futility of life as Chekhov was.

We tried to contrast life and ideals, and express this contrast scenically by a combination of various very different effects. This is why we made a bright, carefree atmosphere reign throughout the first act, replaced by a cold, chilly atmosphere in the second act, and followed in the third act by a stifling, oppressive atmosphere, with a smell of burning, the very air throbbing with anxiety which seized everybody. Then the clear, crystal-clear quality of the last act came as the logical conclusion to the tragedy.

We sought this combination in every character, in every scene, and sometimes it arose of its own accord, spontaneously, quite unexpectedly.

We did not set out with the express aim of reinterpreting Chekhov, or amazing the world with a completely new

reading of *The Three Sisters*. We only had one aim: to bring out in the work the thoughts and feelings that make Chekhov so necessary and vital today.

In our age of advanced technology nothing but old clichés and worn traditions is conceived for communication with "the beyond" that is the world of the classics. The connection becomes ever more tenuous. Mayakovsky, by the strength of his imagination, love and talent, brought Pushkin to life and conversed with him for a whole night. Perhaps we shall succeed in bringing to life Shakespeare or Griboyedov, Chekhov or Ostrovsky, at least for an evening?

It is worth all the time, energy and tremendous effort involved for the pleasure of spending an evening with the wisest, most amusing and most brilliant people in human history.

We are duty bound to solve the problem of the theatrical classics, to solve it along with the major task—the creation of works reflecting the processes of present-day life. Every director may have his own way, but all the individual paths lead from the same point of departure—the attempt to break free of all the customary, preconceived ideas about how they should be played in order to read them as though for the first time, as though they had just been written. We must approach a classic as we would a contemporary play.

For the time being, the problem remains a highly complicated one, and no individual director, however talented, is in a position to solve the problem of the classics in the modern theatre. Its solution requires a collective effort.

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